English Observed

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OLIPHANT

ENGLISH OBSERVED

COMMON ERRORS IN WRITTEN ENGLISH

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ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
BOMBAY — CALCUTTA

By the same author

A General Certificate English Course
A Short Course in English Grammar
English in Action
Punctuation
A Revision Course in English, etc.

First Indian Edition: January, 1956

Rs. 2-8

PRINTED BY G. G. PATHARE AT THE POPULAR PRESS (BOM.) LTD., BOMBAY 7.
PUBLISHED BY P. S. JAYASINGHE, ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY

PREFACE

If students seriously wish to improve their English, there is one never-failing way in which they can do so, and that is by practice. But it must be by regular and well-directed practice. Many pitfalls are sure to be encountered by the learner, and it is the object of this book to show how some of these pitfalls can be avoided. For the emphasis is here placed not so much upon the rules for the writing of good English as upon the errors that result from the breaking of the rules; or, rather, upon the particular kinds of errors which experience shows that most students, and many other people, commonly make. The errors discussed, therefore, do not relate to Grammar only, but include errors made in the Use of Words, in Constructing a Sentence and a Paragraph, in Punctuation, and in the Writing of the Complete Composition. Thus the essentials of the subject are covered, and are presented from a less conventional, but, it is hoped, a more immediately helpful, point of view.

The book should be found suitable for pupils in the middle forms of Grammar Schools, for students in Evening Institutes, and for all those private students, including advanced foreign students, who wish to strengthen their English.

I have to express my sincere thanks to the University of London for their kind permission to use some of the questions set at the General School Examination.

Lancelot Oliphant

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I

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

As it will be our main purpose in the course of these lessons to point out and explain to you what is *not* good English, so that you may note and correct the various kinds of errors you are most likely to make, we must obviously have in mind some standard of comparison by which we can judge what *is* good English. Well, we have no Academy in this country to provide such a standard, but it may be of some help if we say that good English is the kind that is spoken and written by the majority of educated people. In other words, the criterion is Usage. But it must be remembered that English, being a living language, is always in a state of change, and that it is consequently impossible to lay down any permanent hard and fast rules for writing it. All that can be done is to indicate, so far as is practicable, what is the prevailing custom. Hence the kind of English that you should try to speak and write is good current English—the kind that is being spoken and written by educated people at the present day.

II

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF WORDS

When we wish to communicate our thoughts to other people, we nearly always do so by means of Words. It is therefore of great importance that words should be used correctly. Very often, however, they are not, and amongst the more usual kinds of mistakes made are the following:

Excessive Use of Long Words

Certain writers have a pronounced liking for long and unfamiliar words, as they think that these sound more impressive. A clergyman, for instance, in their vocabulary, becomes 'the reverend gentleman', a drunken man 'an inebriated individual', long words 'polysyllabic vocables', and a big fire 'a colossal conflagration'. This pompous and inflated style of writing is no aid to clearness; in fact it has exactly the opposite effect: it merely perplexes the reader.

Here is a longer specimen:

> He was assaulted, during his precipitated return, by the rudest fierceness of wintry elemental strife; through which, with bad accommodations and innumerable accidents, he became a prey to the merciless pangs of the acutest spasmodic rheumatism, which barely suffered him to reach home, ere, long and piteously, it confined him, a tortured prisoner, to his bed.
>
> *Fanny Burney*

The language here is laboured and heavy, and impedes the thought. Our object should be to write much simpler English than that—English, for instance, such as we find in this piece of prose:

> Three white wands had been stuck in the sand to mark the Poet's grave, but as they were at some distance from each other, we had to cut a trench thirty yards in length, in the line of the sticks, to ascertain the exact spot, and it was nearly an hour before we came upon the grave.
>
> In the meantime Byron and Leigh Hunt arrived in the carriage, attended by soldiers, and the Health Officer, as before. The lonely and grand scenery that surrounded us so exactly harmonised with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. The sea, with the islands of Gorgona, Capraji, and Elba, was before us; old battlemented watch-towers stretched along the coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the sun, picturesque from their diversified outlines, and not a human dwelling was in sight. As I thought of the delight Shelley felt in such scenes of loneliness and grandeur whilst living, I felt we were no better than a herd of wolves or a pack of wild dogs, in tearing out his battered and naked body from the pure yellow sand that lay so lightly over it, to drag him back to the light of day; but the dead have no voice, nor had I power to check the sacrilege. *E. J. Trelawny*

This, like Addison's, is a good 'middle style' of writing, and is suitable for most purposes. True, there *are* occasions when a massive style is more appropriate (as in the work of Gibbon), but they are rare.

Tautology

Another common fault in the use of words is **tautology**:

that is, the repetition, in a slightly different form, of what has already been said; as—

1. It was a **joint partnership** that proved to be highly successful.
   (Here **joint** is implied in **partnership.**)

2. The **surrounding environment** was infinitely depressing.
   (Environment implies **surrounding.)**

3. It rained **continuously** and **without intermission** the whole day long.
   (Continuously and **without intermission** mean the same thing, and both are redundant. Write, 'It rained all day'.)

4. This butterfly was **extremely unique** and the **most perfect** living specimen we had ever seen.
   (Unique and **perfect** are absolute words, and cannot be modified. A thing is either unique or not unique, perfect or not perfect. **Extremely** and **most** are superfluous.)

5. He of course failed, and **the reason is because** he didn't work.
   (This is a very common error. We can say either, 'He of course failed, because he didn't work', or, 'He of course failed, and the reason is that he didn't work'; but **not** 'the reason is because'.)

Verbosity

Verbosity means the use of more words than are necessary, whether the words are long or short. It is not due to repeating what has already been said, but to a roundabout way of talking or writing, instead of going straight ahead; as in the following:

'Copperfield', said Mr Micawber, 'farewell! Every happiness and prosperity! If, in the progress of revolving years, I could persuade myself that my blighted destiny had been a warning to you, I should feel that I had not occupied another man's place in existence altogether in vain. In case of anything turning up (of which I am rather confident), I shall be extremely happy if it should be in my power to improve your prospects'. *Charles Dickens*

This might be simplified as follows:

'Copperfield', said Mr Micawber, 'farewell! Every happiness and prosperity! If, as time passes, I could believe that my misfortunes had been a warning to you, I should feel that I had not lived in vain. Should it be possible in future to help you, and I think it may be, I shall be very happy to do so'

The verbosity has now disappeared. But then so has Mr Micawber. None the less, we should do well to take the second version as our guide.

Lack of Precision

Our choice and use of words should be definite and exact. We must therefore try to choose the right word on all occasions. A word that is 'near enough' will not do. It must be *the* word, and no other.

There are some groups of words the members of which differ from one another by only a very fine shade of meaning. These are called *synonyms,* and the words in each group need to be very carefully discriminated. Take the following group for example: *renew, renovate, revive, refresh.* We *renew* a wireless licence, *renovate* an old coat, *revive* a person who has fainted, *refresh* ourselves with a cup of tea.

Malaprops

There are certain pairs of words, however (usually somewhat alike in form), that are especially liable to be confused. Consider these pairs, for instance: *incredulous* and *incredible*, *libel* and *slander*, *stationery* and *stationary, uninterested* and *disinterested, farther* and *further. Incredulous* means 'unbelieving', and *incredible* 'unbelievable'; *libel* means 'written defamation of character', *slander* 'spoken defamation of character'; *stationery* means 'writing materials, etc.', *stationary* 'remaining in one place'; *uninterested* means 'not interested', *disinterested* 'impartial'; *farther,* says the Oxford English Dictionary, is generally used when the word is intended to be the comparative for *far,* while *further* is used where the notion of far is absent. Hence, according to this, we should say, 'The town was *farther* away than he thought', and 'A *further* instalment of this story will be given next week'. It cannot be said, however, that this distinction is at all generally observed, most writers preferring to use *further* on all occasions. None the less, the use of *farther,* in relation to distance, is still fairly common.

So long as these and other similar distinctions are known and observed, well and good. But when one of the pair of words is mistaken for the other, malaprops are likely to arise. A *malaprop* is the confusion of one word with another something like it in form or sound, but quite different from it in meaning. It is named after Mrs Malaprop, a humorous character in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, who is made to speak in this illiterate but amusing way. She talks, for instance, of *orthodoxy* when she means *orthography,* of *reprehend* when she means *comprehend,* and *caparisons* when she means *comparisons.* A very common malaprop is seen in such a sentence as, 'They were married at a *Registry* Office', which should be '*Register* Office', or '*Registrar's* Office', a Registry Office being a place where servants are engaged. Another malaprop, almost equally common, results from

confusing *certified* with *certificated;* as, 'All our masters are fully *certified*', which should of course be 'fully *certificated*'.

Pairs of Words often Confused

Here is a list containing a number of such pairs of words. Their meaning should be carefully studied in a good dictionary:

accept, except
affect, effect
allusion, illusion
ascetic, aesthetic
barbarous, barbaric
beneficial, beneficent
birth, berth
caste, cast
ceiling, sealing
cereal, serial
ceremonious, ceremonial
childlike, childish
comic, comical
complacent, complaisant
complement, compliment
comprehensive, comprehensible
congenial, congenital
contemptible, contemptuous
continual, continuous
corporate, corporal
counsel, council
credible, creditable
cue, queue
deficient, defective
definite, definitive
depreciate, deprecate
desert, dessert
dissent, descent
efficient, effective
elementary, elemental
elicit, illicit
eminent, imminent
exceedingly, excessively
exceptional, exceptionable
expedient, expeditious
faint, feint
gristly, grizzly
illusive, elusive
infectious, contagious
imaginative, imaginary
imperial, imperious
indict, indite
industrial, industrious
ingenious, ingenuous
judicial, judicious
licence, license
loose, lose
luxurious, luxuriant
martial, marshal
masterly, masterful
mendicity, mendacity
momentary, momentous
notable, notorious
observance, observation
official, officious
ordinance, ordnance
palate, palette
pathos, bathos
personify, personate
perspicacity, perspicuity
pertinent, pertinacious
politic, political
populous, populace

practical, practicable
practice, practise
prescribe, proscribe
precipitous, precipitate
primary, primitive
principal, principle
punctual, punctilious
quartz, quarts
respective, respectful
salubrious, salutary
satire, satyr
scull, skull
sensitive, sensible
sensual, sensuous
sentient, sententious
signet, cygnet
silvery, silvern
slight, sleight
social, sociable
spacious, specious
spirituous, spiritual
statue, statute
stimulus, stimulant
suspicious, superstitious
symbol, cymbal
temporal, temporary
transitory, transitional
venal, venial
veracity, voracity
vocation, avocation

Words Commonly Misused

The following are some individual words that are frequently misused:

Aggravate

You are the most **aggravating** woman I have ever known.

(**Aggravate** means 'to make heavier', 'to intensify', and **not** 'to exasperate', or 'to annoy'. We can aggravate, say, a dangerous situation, but we cannot aggravate a person.)

Antiquarian

Mr Stevens was an **antiquarian** of great repute, and his knowledge of antiquities was remarkable.

(**Antiquarian** does not mean 'a collector of ancient things', the word for which is **antiquary,** but 'relating to ancient things'. **Antiquarian,** in short, is an adjective, not a noun.)

Awfully

'She's an **awfully** jolly girl', he said; 'you'd like her'

(**Awful** means 'inspiring fear or reverence', and

awfully should not be used to mean 'very' or 'extremely'.)

•

Calligraphy

I have never seen such disgraceful **calligraphy.**

(**Calligraphy** means, not merely 'handwriting', but 'beautiful handwriting'. 'Disgraceful beautiful handwriting' is therefore nonsense.)

Condign

Such behaviour merited **condign** punishment, and it was as severe as they could make it.

(**Condign** means 'well-deserved', 'suitable', and not 'severe' as is sometimes mistakenly supposed.)

Decimate

During the action the entire force was **decimated**, not a man remaining alive.

(**Decimate** is often wrongly used to mean 'annihilate', whereas, strictly speaking, it means 'to reduce by one tenth'. It can however be used more freely to mean 'to destroy a large proportion of'.)

Demean

How can you **demean** yourself by doing such a dishonourable thing?

(**Demean** means 'to conduct' oneself, not 'to debase' or 'to degrade'.)

Female

The parcel was brought by a young **female.**

(**Female** means 'one of the sex that produces young', and is used of animals as well as of human beings. The word 'woman' should here be used.)

Individual

He was an **individual** of singularly uninviting appearance.

(An **individual** is one human being as opposed to a number forming a society or a family. Consequently the word cannot be used as a synonym for 'person'.)

Infer

You don't say so openly, but you **infer** that I am dishonest.

(**Infer** means 'to draw a conclusion', and not 'to insinuate' or 'to express indirectly' The right word here is **imply.**)

Kudos

He spends lavishly, and obviously has plenty of **kudos.**

(**Kudos** means 'glory' or 'renown', not 'money' In any case it is slang.)

Literally

When she saw the ghost she was **literally** frozen with horror.

(**Literally** means 'using a word in its ordinary sense'; that is, without metaphor. In this sentence it is used for emphasis, with a complete disregard of its true meaning.)

Mutual

Dickens was the **mutual** friend of John Forster and Wilkie Collins.

(**Mutual** means 'reciprocal'; as, 'Tom and Charles never got on well together; their dislike was **mutual'.** It should not be used to mean 'common', the word required in the faulty sentence given above. In conversation, however, it is sometimes permissible to use 'mutual'

in the sense of 'common', especially when the meaning, as in 'common friend', is likely to be misunderstood.)

Nice

When we were in the Lake District we saw some very **nice** mountain scenery.

(**Nice** means 'fastidious', 'delicate', 'refined', and should not be used indiscriminately to mean 'pleasant', 'agreeable', or 'beautiful'.)

Partake

He **partook** of a small ham sandwich.

(**Partake** means 'to share in common with others', not 'to take the whole'.)

Practically

It was **practically** impossible to carry out the work, but we succeeded in doing so after a great effort.

(**Practically** is opposed to **theoretically,** and should not be used to mean **almost.** If it was **practically** impossible to do the work, it could not be done. But in conversation the usage may pass.)

Transpire

This is the kind of thing that **transpires** every day.

(The right word here is **happens. Transpire** means 'to come out by degrees', and should be used only when that is the meaning intended; as, 'For long the crime was undiscovered, but it ultimately **transpired** that Barker was the thief'.)

Verbal

As he did not wish to write a letter he gave a **verbal** reply.

(**Verbal** means 'pertaining to words', and can be something either spoken or written; but it is

often confused with 'oral', which means, 'by word of mouth', i.e. 'spoken'.)

Words Frequently Mis-spelt

Spelling is often a worry even to the careful student, and unfortunately not much can be done about it. Rules for spelling are of little use, as, generally speaking, the spellings are easier to remember than the rules. Here, however, are some scores of words which you may care to study. They are among those most often mis-spelt. The list will be found of use for purposes of reference.

abyss
accommodate
aerated
agreeable
aisle
alley
allotment
allotted
ally
amiable
annihilate
antidote
aquatic
aqueduct
Arctic
assassin
assuage
awry
balloon
balloted
bankruptcy
battalion
benefited
besiege
boatswain
Britain
Briton
broccoli
bumptious
buses
business
captious
catarrh
catastrophe
catechism
catholicism
chameleon
changeable
charlatan
collaborate
committee
comparative
concrete
connoisseur
coolly
colander
colonnade
corroborate
courtesy
dahlia
deceive
diaphragm
diarrhoea
dilemma
diphtheria
diphthong
discipline
efficacy
eighth
eligible
Elysium
embarrass
encyclopaedia
enrolment
episcopacy
equanimity
erysipelas
espionage
etymology
eulogium
evenness
exaggerate
excrescence
fascinate
feign
forestall
forty
foully
fuchsia
fulfil
functionary
Galilee
galleon
galloping

goddess
government
grievance
guillotine
handkerchief
harass
heifer
heinous
heresy
homicide
idiocy
illegible
illimitable
imminent
indictment
ineligible
iniquitous
inveigle
isosceles
knick-knack
lacquer
leisure
liege
lieutenant
lily
literally
longitude
machination
magnanimous
manoeuvre
mathematician
mechanism
Mediterranean
millennium
millionaire
miniature
miscellaneous
mischievous
mistletoe
mythology
necessary

nickname
ninth
nonchalance
noticeable
nuisance
oblique
occasion
occurred
offered
offertory
opaque
oxygen
pageantry
panacea
panegyric
paraffin
paralleled
paralysis
parliament
pavilion
peaceable
perceive
pharmacopoeia
philanthropy
phthisis
physiognomy
plagiarism
plebeian
pneumonia
possession
practice
(noun)
practise
(verb)
precede
precedence
predecessor
preferred
principal
principle
proceed

prophecy
(noun)
prophesy
(verb)
psychiatrist
psychology
pyramid
qualm
quarrelling
quarantine
receive
reconnaissance
referred
relieve
repartee
reminiscence
reprieve
resistance
retrieve
rheumatism
rhododendron
saleable
sanitary
sciatica
scissors
seize
separate
sergeant
singeing
skilful
sleight
solicitude
sophistry
sovereignty
spinach
stationary
(adj.)
stationery
(noun)
statistics
strategy

strychnine	tarpaulin	vilify
subpoena	tattoo	villain
successful	tragedian	volunteer
suddenness	traceable	wantonness
supersede	transferred	weird
surprise	unwieldy	wiry
sycophant	ventriloquism	witticism
symmetry	vermilion	worshipped
synonym	veterinary	yacht
synopsis	vicissitude	zoology

Difficulties with Idioms

An Idiom is a turn of expression that is peculiar to a particular language, and cannot as a rule be translated literally into any other language. For instance, 'small talk', 'by word of mouth', 'in sackcloth and ashes', are idioms.

This part of the subject should receive your very special attention, as the writing of good natural English depends more upon the correct use of idioms than upon anything else.

Idioms can be divided into three main classes according as they come under the headings of (a) Grammar; (b) Metaphor; (c) Prepositional Usage.

Grammar

Idioms that belong to this class are not all necessarily ungrammatical. For example, idioms such as 'It's me' 'Who do you mean?', 'The best of the two', do break the rules of Grammar; while others, such as 'autumn crocus' (noun used as adjective), 'He ran three miles' (adverbial accusative), 'the city of London' (appositional use of *of*) do not.

Metaphor

A great many idioms are metaphorical in kind. A Metaphor, it may be explained, is a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is applied to an object to which it is not literally applicable; as, 'He had a ***hard***

life'. But metaphorical phrases, and even complete sentences, are frequently used idiomatically; such as 'I smell a rat', the whole of which forms the idiom. Other examples of this metaphorical usage are: 'to cross the Rubicon', 'at a snail's pace', 'a raw recruit'.

Wrong Prepositional Usage

Here certain words are regularly followed by certain definite prepositions, and it is in this connection that errors of idiom most commonly arise; for there is usually no reason why, in the nature of things, a word should be followed by one preposition rather than by another.

The following are some examples of wrong prepositional usage, and show the kinds of mistakes that are usually made:

'Accomplished **at**'

She was remarkably **accomplished at** singing and dancing.

(Write, 'accomplished **in**'.)

'Adverse **from**'

Most of them were in favour of this course of action, but Wilson was **adverse from** the whole project.

(Write, 'adverse **to**'.)

'Agree **with**' (a proposal)

They said they were unable to **agree with** the proposal.

(Write, 'agree **to**'. We agree **to** a proposal, but **with** a person or an opinion.)

'Aim **to**' and 'Aim **for**'

They **aim to** do the work in three weeks.

This is one of the things we are always **aiming for**.

(Write, 'aim **at** doing', and 'aiming **at**'.)

'Averse **from**'

Mr Brewer was **averse from** taking such a drastic step.

(Write, 'averse **to**', although 'averse **from**' is accepted by some writers.)

'Centre **round**'

The whole question **centres round** Carter's dismissal.

(Write, 'centres **on**' or 'centres **in**'.)

'Connive **in**'

There can be no doubt that he had **connived in** this piece of trickery.

(Write, 'connived **at**'.)

'Consist **of**' instead of 'Consist **in**'

His philosophy of life **consists of** doing as little as possible for as much as possible.

('Consist **of**' means 'is made up of', and is generally used in a material sense. 'Consist **in**' means 'is comprised in', and generally introduces a definition or a statement. Here we should write 'consists in'.)

'Derive **in**'

He **derives no pleasure in** hearing of the misfortunes of others.

(Write, 'derives no pleasure **from**'.)

'Different **to**'

The play was quite **different to** what I expected.

(Some writers think that 'different **to**' has now become an idiom; others prefer to say 'different **from**'. We advise you for the time being to say 'different **from**'.)

'Disagree **from**'

The judge **disagreed from** the verdict of the jury.

(Write, 'disagreed **with**'.)

'Embark **on**' (a ship)

They **embarked on** a liner for America.

(Write, 'embarked **in**'. We embark **in** a ship, but **on** an enterprise.)

'Endowed **by**'

He was **endowed by** many outstanding qualities.

(Write, 'endowed **with**'.)

'Indifferent **of**'

She had waited so long that she was completely **indifferent of** success.

(Write, 'indifferent **to**'.)

'Insensible **of**'

Walter was **insensible of** all the kindness he had received.

(Write, 'insensible **to**'.)

'Live **at**' and 'Live **in**'

At one time they **lived in** Harrow, but afterwards they went to **live at** Glasgow.

(Write, '**at** Harrow', and '**in** Glasgow': 'at' for small towns, and 'in' for large ones.)

'Oblivious **to**'

They were **oblivious to** all that was going on around them.

(Write, 'oblivious **of**'.)

'**On** a moment's notice'

He was dismissed **on a moment's notice.**

(Write, '**at** a moment's notice'.)

Right Prepositional Usage

The following is a fairly representative list of prepositions which, according to modern usage, should follow certain words:

2

abide by
absolve from (blame, etc.)
absolve of (sin, etc.)
abstain from
abut on
accede to
accompany by
accrue to (a person)
accrue from (a thing)
acquiesce in
acquit of
act on or upon
adapt from
admit to (a place)
admit of (an excuse, etc.)
affinity with
alien to
amenable to
amused by
amused at
analogous to
angry at or about (a thing)
angry with (a person)
avail of
based on
believe in
beset by
carp at
caution against
cavil at
characterised by
collaborate with
commiserate with
compatible with
compensate for or with
compliance with
composed of
condole with
conducive to
confer with
confer on
confide in
confide to
conform to
consecrate to
consequent on
consistent with
contemporary with
content with
contingent on
contrast with
conversant with
correspond to
correspond with
deduce from
defraud of
demur at
depend on
deposit at (some place)
deposit with (some person)
desist from
despair of
destined for
destined to
deter from
detract from
devolve on
dilate on
discriminate between
embarrass by
endue with
enforce on
entrust to
essential to
exception to
exempt from
impatient of
impervious to
indignant at (something)
indignant with (some one)
infuse into
initiate into

instil into
intolerant of
inveigle into
irrespective of
liable to
negligent of
originate in
parallel to
partake of
participate in
practised in
preface with
prefix to
prejudice against
preoccupied with
presume on
prevail on
profit by
prone to
propensity to
quick at or to
reckon on
reckon with
reconcile with or to
reek of
repent of
repugnant to
resort to
responsible for
responsible to
resulting in
sensitive to
submit to
substitute for
sympathise with.
trust in
trust to
umbrage at
vexed at
vexed with

Choice of Idioms

As regards the choice of idioms—for not all idioms are of equal rank, from the point of view of good English —this will turn largely upon the circumstances in which they are used. There are:

1. Those used in good written English; such as, *a flash in the pan, by fits and starts, with might and main.*
2. Those used in ordinary conversation; such as, *to show one's teeth, a seven days' wonder, in a trice.*
3. Those used in familiar conversation; such as, *to turn up trumps, to give in, an ugly customer.*
4. Slang; such as, *spiv, wide boy, a low dive.*

Hence the idioms with which you are chiefly concerned are those in divisions Nos. 1 and 2. But you will probably

also use a good many in division 3, and some at least in division 4, although not of course in written work.

Your chief difficulty, however, will be in determining to which division some of the idioms belong, as one division tends to merge into another. You can get a little help from a good book on the subject, such as Logan Pearsall Smith's *Words and Idioms;* but a great deal will depend on the careful reading of good literature.

Barbarisms

As we have seen, the kind of English we should try to speak and write is good English, or Standard English, as it is often called; that is, the kind spoken and written by the majority of educated people all over the country. Some writers, however, from time to time, fall short of this standard, and introduce other kinds of words which, for one reason or another, are regarded as not good English. Among these Barbarisms are Foreign Words, Slang Words, and New Words.

Foreign Words are, as a rule, out of place in English composition, especially when there are good English equivalents. There is nothing to be gained, for instance, by saying *Qu'importe?* instead of 'What does it matter?', or *Pas possible!* instead of 'You don't say so!', or *Pro bono publico* when you mean 'For the public good'. But when you wish to express an idea for which there is no suitable English word or phrase, such as *Coup d'état, Esprit d'escalier,* or *Enfant terrible,* a foreign word or phrase can then of course be used.

Slang Words, which have already been touched upon under Idioms, usually offend against good taste, as they are often crude and vulgar, and fall appreciably below the level of Standard English. But the chief objection to slang words is that they are vague and inexact in their application, little regard being paid to their real

meaning. It must be admitted, however, that some slang words or phrases, such as, 'It's *a mug's game*', 'He's *up against it*', and 'You've *had it*', neatly, and sometimes wittily, express an idea for which there is no equivalent in good English.

New Words are being constantly coined to meet modern requirements, and are very often indispensable. But you should not use those whose meaning is likely to be unknown to the particular class of reader for whom you are writing. This will usually be the general reader. For instance, words and phrases such as *streamlined, talkie, deepie, frogmen, fully-fashioned, psychiatry, psycho-analysis, allergic,* are known to all; while such words as *gleep* (a kind of atomic pile), *bizone,* and *existential* are known to comparatively few.

Here are some more words or phrases recently introduced: *A-bomb*, *cold war*, *zoot suit*, *zebra crossing, cagey, pin-point, stooge, displaced person, prang, brush-off*.

EXERCISES ON WORDS

1. Use each of the following words in a sentence which helps to bring out the meaning of the word:

(a) Aqueduct, alignment, taboo, corrosion, analogy, moult, rancour, anomalous, succinct, condign, trophy, bureau.
(b) Septic, sceptic, pusillanimous, panacea, literal, qualm, ennui, peroration, stipend, sexton, cynosure, latitude.
(c) Minaret, synthesis, acolyte, casuist, emulate, delegate, diocese, captious, brochure, bivouac, élite, augur.
(d) Prejudice, forensic, defalcation, antiseptic, humid, theme, pretension, fragile, purser, desiccated, flaunt.

(e) Specious, cenotaph, predecessor, rhapsody, abysmal, metropolis, parricide, quarantine, vicarious, chimera, accoutre, parasite.

2. Give the correct pronunciation of the following words, and state the meaning of each:

(a) Respite, threshold, withhold, forehead, gnome, fifth, indict, despicable, cinema, concrete, skeleton, awry.
(b) Cough, bough, rough, hiccough, chauffeur, isosceles, garage, gauge, language, venison, champagne, brougham.
(c) Label, libel, liable, friend, fiend, pneumonia, hospital, carcase, laboratory, hangar, pudding, lettuce.
(d) Physic, physique, smile, simile, irascible, goal, gaol, veterinary, epitome, colonel, diphtheria, obligatory.
(e) Accompany, accomplish, ideal, sinecure, acumen, sylph, imbecile, schedule, opaque, ghoul, soul, rissole.

3. Write down a word similar in meaning to each of the following words, and use, in an illustrative sentence, each of the synonyms you have given:

(a) Cure, prudent, irritate, faultless, headstrong, neighbourhood, infringe, fascinate, normal, forcible.
(b) Proselyte, ingenuous, residue, cowardly, poisonous, sample, monetary, eulogy, taciturn, exorbitant.
(c) Jeopardy, eccentric, aphorism, synopsis, opulent, homicide, sprightly, disclose, countryman, exalt.
(d) Ravage, thwart, supplicate, estimate, resemblance, tranquillity, recapitulate, disturbance, notable, resolute.

4. Write down a word opposite in meaning to each of the following, and use, in an illustrative sentence, each of the antonyms you have given:

(a) Proximity, solemn, analysis, sombre, cunning, maximum, destroy, indulgent, stationary, transparent.
(b) Generous, precede, falsehood, constancy, defeat, praiseworthy, discord, foolish, verse, adversity.
(c) Enmity, linger, loose, union, loquacious, patriotic, prominent, practically, extravagant, courteous.
(d) Deteriorate, repudiate, loathe, expand, freeze, illustrious, puny, inert, plentiful, prone.

5. Explain the meaning of the following idioms, and say to which of the four classes mentioned you think that each idiom belongs:

(a) A lump sum, fair play, to see eye to eye, in at the death, to heap coals of fire, the coast is clear, to bring to book, to break the news, to make a clean breast of it, the thin end of the wedge.
(b) To play truant, a trumped up charge, the tug of war, true-blue, treasure-trove, to put one's shoulder to the wheel, short shrift, where the shoe pinches, to make oneself scarce, a rope of sand.
(c) To prick up the ears, played out, the observed of all observers, to rest on one's oars, to make one's mark, as mad as a March hare, the lion's share, to turn one's head, to take time by the forelock, to jump at.
(d) In justice to, the order of the day, to play fast and loose, to run to seed, to put the screw on, silent as the grave, to escape by the skin of one's teeth, to call a spade a spade, all square, on the spur of the moment.

6. Distinguish between the meanings of the words in each of the following groups, and use each word in an illustrative sentence:

(a) Dispute, resist, oppose, withstand.
(b) Wish, desire, inclination, disposition, preference.
(c) Irritate, exasperate, provoke, annoy, torment, vex.
(d) Brave, bold, valiant, courageous, intrepid, dauntless.
(e) Irony, satire, ridicule, sarcasm, derision.

7. Use two appropriate adjectives with each of the following nouns, and then put the noun with its adjectives into an illustrative sentence:

(a) Buccaneer, peasant, proverb, battle, defeat, victory, music, village, mistake, souvenir.
(b) Sheik, dungeon, angler, dowager, debutante, comedian, detective, thief, virago, dandy.

8. Find the best single word to express the idea conveyed by each of the following:

(a) Relating to one as distinguished from others.
(b) Carefulness in employment of money.
(c) Ability to read and write.
(d) Gathering of people for purchase and sale of provisions or livestock.
(e) Security against loss or damage.
(f) Level space in gardens occupied by flower-beds.
(g) Subdivision of a county having its own church and clergyman.
(h) Conference for debating points in dispute.
(i) Interval of inaction or silence, especially from hesitation.
(j) Freedom from captivity, imprisonment, slavery, or despotic control.
(k) Word, clause, or sentence, inserted into a passage to which it is not grammatically essential.

9. Write the following in simple English:

(a) The offence was of a felonious nature, and therefore one that was liable to produce prolonged incarceration.
(b) If beneficence can be judged by the happiness which it diffuses, whose claim, by that proof, shall stand higher than that of Mrs Montagu, from the munificence with which she celebrated her annual festival for those hapless artificers who perform the most abject offices of any authorised calling, in being the active guardians of our blazing hearths? Not to vainglory, then, but to kindness of heart, should be adjudged the publicity of that superb charity which made its jetty objects, for one bright morning, cease to consider themselves as degraded outcasts from all society.

10. Give some examples of new words that have recently been invented, and say which of them you think are likely to remain in permanent use.

11. Give the adjectives corresponding to the following nouns:

circle, cat, horse, wood, statue, century, south, bronze, uncle.

III

COMMON ERRORS IN CONSTRUCTING A SENTENCE AND A PARAGRAPH

A SENTENCE is a group of words expressing a complete thought. A Paragraph is a group of sentences forming one of the main divisions of a complete composition. Thus both are divisions of the complete composition but the paragraph is the larger division of the two. The sentence and the paragraph therefore have a great deal in common, and it will be found that their essential features are much the same.

Unity

The first of these is Unity. This means, in its widest sense, *oneness;* that is, being formed of parts that make up a whole. Hence both the sentence and the paragraph will have unity if nothing is omitted from them which ought to be included, and nothing included which does not form a necessary part of the whole.

Breach of Unity

These requirements, however, are not always observed, and then a faulty sentence or paragraph results. Take the following sentence, for example:

> The foot immediately went on shore, the horse were next day landed, and the artillery and heavy baggage sent to Topsham, where the prince intended to stay some time, both to refresh his men and to give the country an opportunity to declare its affections.
>
> *Burnet*

The first part of this sentence, down to the word 'Topsham', deals with the disposal of the prince's forces; the remainder gives his reasons for deciding to stay at Topsham. These are two main facts and should therefore be put into two separate sentences:

> The foot immediately went on shore, the horse were next day landed, and the artillery and heavy baggage sent to Topsham. Here the prince intended to stay some time, both to refresh his men and to give the country an opportunity to declare its affections.

Let us now take an example of lack of unity in a paragraph:

> *Twelfth Night* is justly considered as one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies. It is full of sweetness and pleasantry. It is perhaps too good-natured for comedy. It has little satire and no spleen. It aims at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. It makes us laugh at the follies of mankind not despise them, and still less bear any ill-will towards them. Shakespeare's comic genius resembles the bee rather in its power of extracting sweets from weeds or poisons, than in leaving a sting behind it. He gives the most amusing exaggeration of the prevailing foibles of his characters, but in a way that they themselves, instead of being offended at, would almost join in to humour; he rather contrives opportunities for them to show themselves off in the happiest lights, than renders them contemptible in the perverse construction of the wit or malice of others. There is a certain stage of society in which people become conscious of their peculiarities and absurdities, affect to disguise what they are, and set up pretensions to what they are not. This gives rise to a corresponding style of comedy, the object of which is to detect the disguises of self-love, and to make reprisals on these preposte-

rous assumptions of vanity, by marking the contrast between the real and the affected character as severely as possible, and denying to those, who would impose on us for what they are not, even the merit which they have. This is the comedy of artificial life.

William Hazlitt

If we read this passage carefully we shall find that it deals with three separate topics. The first of these, down to the words 'towards them', is 'The merits of *Twelfth Night* as a comedy'; the second, from that point down to the words 'malice of others', is 'The general characteristics of Shakespeare's comic genius'; and the third, from 'There is a certain stage' to the end, is 'The comedy of artificial life'. Hence a separate paragraph should be devoted to each.

In the passage quoted we have an example of one of the commonest errors in paragraph construction—lack of unity due to the inclusion of more than one topic in the same paragraph. But there are other errors that involve a breach of unity, the two most important of which are (1) the use of two or more paragraphs to deal with what is actually only one topic, and (2) the introduction into a paragraph of something that has no real bearing on the topic.

Here is an example of the first of these:

I had now come in sight of the house. It is a large building of brick, with stone quoins, and is in the Gothic style of Queen Elizabeth's day, having been built in the first year of her reign. The exterior remains very nearly in its original state, and may be considered a fair specimen of the residence of a wealthy country gentleman of those days.

A great gateway opens from the park into a kind of courtyard in front of the house, ornamented with a grass-plot, shrubs, and flower-beds. The gateway is in imitation of the ancient barbican—being a kind of

outpost, and flanked by towers, though evidently for mere ornament instead of defence.

The front of the house is completely in the old style; with stone-shafted casements, a great bow-window of heavy stonework, and a portal with armorial bearings over it, carved in stone. At each corner of the building is an octagon tower, surmounted by a gilt ball and weathercock.

These three paragraphs form part of the description of Sir Thomas Lucy's house at Charlecote—or, rather, of its exterior—and should therefore be reduced to one.

As regards the second point mentioned—the introduction into a paragraph of something that has no real bearing on the topic—this may be an equally serious fault, as may be seen from the following example:

'Very true, Miss Woodhouse, so she will', said Miss Bates. 'He is the very best young man;—but, my dear Jane, if you remember, I told you yesterday he was precisely the height of Mr Perry. Miss Hawkins, —I daresay, an excellent young woman. His extreme attention to my mother—wanted her to sit in the vicarage pew, that she might hear the better, for my mother is a little deaf, you know—it is not much, but she does not hear quite quick. Jane says that Colonel Campbell is a little deaf. He fancied bathing might be good for it—the warm bath—but she says it did him no lasting benefit. Colonel Campbell, you know, is quite our angel. And Mr Dixon seems a very charming young man, quite worthy of him. It is such a happiness when good people get together—and they always do. Now, here will be Mr Elton and Miss Hawkins; and there are the Coles, such very good people; and the Perrys—I suppose there never was a happier or a better couple than Mr and Mrs Perry. I say, sir,' turning to Mr Woodhouse, 'I think there are few places with such society as Highbury. I always

say, we are quite blessed in our neighbours. My dear sir, if there is one thing my mother loves better than another, it is pork—a roast loin of pork'.

Jane Austen

It is difficult to pin Miss Bates down to anything very definite in this amusing rigmarole, but the subjects she introduces would probably provide sufficient material for half a dozen paragraphs.

If a paragraph has unity it should be possible to express its substance in a single sentence. Very often, indeed, such a sentence forms part of the paragraph, and it is then known as the 'topic sentence'. But a topic sentence is not absolutely essential; sometimes the topic is merely implied, and it is then usually called the 'theme'. In either case, unity demands that everything included in the paragraph should help to illustrate, modify, or develop the central idea.

Emphasis

Again, the reader must not be left in any doubt as to what is intended to be the most important part of a sentence or paragraph. In other words, both the sentence and the paragraph should have the right emphasis.

The best way to secure this emphasis is to put the part to be emphasised in the most prominent position; namely, the beginning or the end. The beginning is perhaps the better position of the two, particularly in the paragraph, and therefore the topic sentence should nearly always stand first. To emphasise a particular part of a sentence, it will usually be necessary to invert the normal order of the words; that is, if the part to be emphasised usually stands at the end, it should be placed at the beginning; if it usually stands at the beginning, it should be placed at the end; if it usually stands in the middle, it should be placed at either the beginning or the end. But emphasis in a sentence can also be secured by repeating

a word or phrase, or by arranging the ideas in the ascending order of their importance. Here are some examples of these different methods:

1. Little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men. (Inversion.)

2. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of exalted freedom. (Repetition and inversion combined.)

3. Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen. (Ideas arranged in ascending order of importance.)

Wrong Kind of Emphasis

Emphasis, however, should not be secured by means of underlining, or, in print, by the use of italics. There is no objection to underlining a word now and then to denote emphasis, but the practice should not be carried to excess, as it was by some Victorian writers, including Queen Victoria herself:

> I am *delighted, enchanted, amused,* and *interested,* and think I never saw anything more *beautiful* and gay than Paris—or more splendid than all the Palaces. Our reception is *most* gratifying . . to-night an immense ball at the Hôtel de Ville. They have asked to call a new street, which we opened, *after me!*

Emphasis in a Paragraph

The following is an example of emphasis in a paragraph, the topic sentence being placed first:

> For, indeed, a change was coming upon the world, the meaning and direction of which even still is hidden

from us, a change from era to era. The paths trodden by the footsteps of ages were broken up; old things were passing away, and the faith and the life of ten centuries were dissolving like a dream. Chivalry was dying; the abbey and the castle were soon together to crumble into ruins; and all the forms, desires, beliefs, convictions of the old world were passing away, never to return. A new continent had risen up beyond the western sea. The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space; and the firm earth itself, unfixed from its foundations, was seen to be but a small atom in the awful vastness of the universe. In the fabric of habit which they had so laboriously built for themselves, mankind were to remain no longer. *Froude*

Here the idea to be emphasised is that a change was coming upon the world at the end of the Middle Ages. This is embodied in a topic sentence, which is placed first, so that it can be illustrated and developed in the rest of the paragraph. If it had been placed anywhere else, much of the effect would have been lost.

Coherence

The third characteristic of a good sentence or a good paragraph is Coherence. This means the orderly arrangement of the parts which make up the whole.

If a sentence is to be coherent, all its parts must be arranged in their proper sequence, and the rules of grammar and syntax duly observed. With regard to the order of the parts, the most important rule to remember is the Rule of Proximity, in accordance with which all qualifying words, phrases, and clauses should be placed as near as possible to the words they qualify. With regard to the rules of grammar and syntax, some of the most important of these are incidentally dealt with in the next section.

Lack of Coherence

Here are some examples of incoherence in a sentence, due to the faulty arrangement of its parts:

1. Later a Zeppelin was picked up by searchlights flying at a great altitude.

2. I am sitting down with my pen in my hand filled with a cold resolution to lose my temper thoroughly.

3. Can anything be more distressing than to see a venerable man pouring forth sublime truths in tattered breeches? *Sydney Smith*

4. Very little conference was needed when all were bent upon one desperate purpose infuriated with liquor, and flushed with successful riot. *Dickens*

5. Sir Pitt Crawley, the first shock of grief over, went out a little and partook of that diversion in a white hat with a crêpe round it. *Thackeray*

These sentences should have been arranged as follows:

1. Later a Zeppelin, flying at a great altitude, was picked up by searchlights.

2. Filled with a cold resolution to lose my temper thoroughly, I am sitting down with my pen in my hand.

3. Can anything be more distressing than to see a venerable man, in tattered breeches, pouring forth sublime truths?

4. Very little conference was needed when, infuriated with liquor and flushed with successful riot, all were bent upon one desperate purpose.
5. Sir Pitt Crawley, the first shock of grief over, went out a little, in white hat with a crêpe round it, and partook of that diversion.

If a paragraph is to be coherent, the sentences it contains should form a connected series conducing to a common end. This connection will sometimes be apparent from the mere logical sequence of the thought; but more often other methods must be employed to make it clear. Perhaps the most effective of these is the use of transitional words and phrases; i.e. certain pronouns, adverbs, and conjunctions which, by implying that something has gone before, link up the sentence containing the transitional word or phrase with the sentence that has immediately preceded.

Here is a paragraph in which the transitional words are shown in italics:

> *But* it was decreed that the temper of *that strong mind* should be tried by both extremes of fortune in rapid succession. Close upon *this series of triumphs* came a series of disasters, such as would have blighted the fame and broken the heart of almost *any other* commander. *Yet Frederic,* in the midst of his calamities, was still an object of admiration to his subjects, his allies, and his enemies. Overwhelmed by adversity, sick of life, *he still maintained* the contest, greater in defeat, in flight, and in what seemed hopeless ruin, than on the fields of his proudest victories.
>
> *Macaulay*

Variety in a Paragraph

In addition to Unity, Emphasis, and Coherence, a paragraph should have Variety. This can be secured by varying the type and length of the sentences employed.

Further, the way in which the sentences begin should be varied, as a number of sentences beginning with the same word or the same part of speech has an effect of extreme monotony. There *are* occasions when, in order to produce some special effect, it is permissible to use a series of sentences all formed on the same pattern, and the principle of variety must then give way to this more special consideration.

Length of Sentence and Paragraph

Both long and short sentences have their appropriate uses, but on the whole you will find it better to keep your sentences short. Short sentences are neat, crisp, and forcible, and help towards unity and coherence. They are mainly suitable, however, when the thought is simple and direct:

> In December 1700 Addison embarked at Marseilles. As he glided along the Ligurian coast, he was delighted by the sight of myrtles and olive trees, which retained their verdure under the winter solstice. Soon, however, he encountered one of the black storms of the Mediterranean. The captain of the ship gave up all for lost, and confessed himself to a Capuchin who happened to be on board. The English heretic, in the meantime, fortified himself against the terrors of death with devotions of a very different kind.

On the other hand, when the thought is complex, and it is necessary to group together several closely related ideas, the long sentence is the more suitable:

> Then the cat rose, stretching gloriously, its back a braced arch of sudden muscle, its trembling tail an arch, every finely curved claw visible for a second; but, when the jungle had looked briefly out of its eyes, the placid mask was reassumed, and it strolled to the door.

Both types of sentence, however, have their defects, for

short sentences, if used to excess, become abrupt, jarring, and apparently disconnected, while long sentences, unless very carefully constructed, tend to lose their unity, and to become incoherent and obscure.

Here is a passage in which the sentences are too short:

> The miniature tornado hit Barnsley during a thunderstorm. A roaring wind stripped trees and bent them like saplings. Houses and buildings shook. In similar freak weather, a whirlwind struck Westcliff, Essex, on Monday. *Daily Telegraph*

This is what happens when a sentence is too long:

> With the utmost regard for the family for instance (for I dine with them twice or thrice in a season), I cannot but own that the appearance of the Jenkinses in the Park, in the large barouche with the grenadier-footmen, will surprise and mystify me to my dying day; for though I know the equipage is only jobbed, and all the Jenkins people are on board wages, yet those three men and the carriage must represent an expense of six hundred a year at the very least—and then there are the splendid dinners, the two boys at Eton, the prize governess and masters for the girls, the trip abroad, or to Eastbourne or Worthing in the autumn, the annual ball with a supper from Gunter's (who, by the way, supplies most of the *first-rate* dinners which J. gives, as I know very well, having been invited to one of them to fill a vacant place, when I saw at once that these repasts are very superior to the *common* run of entertainments for which the *humbler* sort of J's. acquaintance get cards)—who, I say, with the most good-natured feelings in the world can help wondering how the Jenkinses make out matters? *Thackeray*

The length of a paragraph will depend to a large

extent upon the kind of composition of which it forms part. In the briefer types, such as the article and the essay, the paragraph will usually be short, but in the more lengthy and elevated types the paragraph will usually be fairly long. Further, the paragraph will also tend to be long in any kind of work in which the style is ornate and elaborate, as otherwise the necessary sweep, rhythm, and cadence could not be attained. Nowadays the tendency is to keep the paragraph short, and, on the whole, this is a practice to be commended. Short paragraphs, like short sentences, make for unity and coherence, and are far easier to construct, so that where the type of composition permits it they should preferably be used.

The One-sentence Paragraph

There is one kind of paragraph, however, that should usually be avoided, and that is the one-sentence paragraph, so favoured by the popular press:

> Last night a big fire broke out in a factory at Wapping, and firemen were on the scene within a few minutes of the outbreak.
>
> By this time, however, the fire had obtained a firm hold on the premises, which were now blazing furiously.
>
> Things began to look serious, and it seemed doubtful if any of the property would be saved.
>
> More help was summoned, and ultimately the fire was subdued; but not until a great deal of damage had been done.

This kind of thing may be necessary to facilitate the rapid scanning of news, but it is usually out of place in ordinary composition. It confuses the work of the sentence with that of the paragraph, and thus makes the meaning of what is written less clear than it otherwise might have been.

EXERCISES ON THE SENTENCE AND THE PARAGRAPH

I

1. Point out any lack of Unity you may find in the following sentences, and, where necessary, rewrite the sentence so as to remedy this defect. Then state the main fact that each sentence contains:

(a) He determined to revisit the scene of last evening's gambol, and, if he met with any of the party, to demand his dog and gun, and as he rose to walk, he found himself stiff in the joints, and wanting in his usual activity.

(b) For the first nine years of my seniority I was not only nominally, but practically the head of the firm, for I had ceased to occupy myself with details, although nothing of importance was concluded without consulting me, so that I was the pivot on which the management turned, but in the tenth year, after a long illness, my wife died, and I was very ill myself, and for months not a paper was sent to me.

(c) A day of thanksgiving was proclaimed by the King, and was celebrated with pride and delight by his people, the rejoicings in England being not less enthusiastic or less sincere; for this may be selected as the point of time at which the military glory of Frederic reached the zenith, as in the short space of three quarters of a year he had won three great battles over the armies of three mighty and warlike monarchies, France, Austria, and Russia.

II

Examine each of the following passages as regards its Unity, Emphasis, and Coherence. Where there is a lack

of unity divide the passage into two, or more than two, paragraphs, naming the theme or topic sentence of each paragraph you make:

1. 'It seems a little thing to cry about', said poor Miss Jellyby apologetically, 'but I am quite worn out. I was directing this new circular till two this morning. I detest the whole thing so, that that alone makes my head ache till I can't see out of my eyes. And look at that poor unfortunate child! Was there ever such a fright as he is!' Peepy, happily unconscious of the defects of his appearance, sat on the carpet behind one of the legs of the piano, looking calmly out of his den at us, while he ate his cake.

2. When the debate was resumed, the tide ran so strongly against the accused that his friends were coughed and scraped down. Pitt declared himself for Sheridan's motion; and the question was carried by a hundred and seventy-five votes against sixty-eight. The Opposition, flushed with victory and strongly supported by the public sympathy, proceeded to bring forward a succession of charges relating chiefly to pecuniary transactions. The friends of Hastings were discouraged, and, having now no hope of being able to avert an impeachment, were not very strenuous in their exertions. At length the House, having agreed to twenty articles of charge, directed Burke to go before the Lords, and to impeach the late Governor-General of High Crimes and Misdemeanours. Hastings was at the same time arrested by the Sergeant-at-Arms, and carried to the bar of the Peers. The session was now within ten days of its close. It was, therefore, impossible that any progress could be made in the trial till the next year. Hastings was admitted to bail; and further proceedings were postponed till the Houses should re-assemble.

3. I went with my niece one day to St. Paul's Churchyard to choose a gown, but it was too much for me to

be in a draper's shop when the brokers' drug sales were just beginning. I left my niece, walked round the Churchyard as fast as I could, trying to make people believe I was busy, and just as I came to Doctors Commons I stumbled against Larkins, who used to travel for Jackman and Larkins. 'Hullo, Whittaker!' said he, 'haven't seen you since you left. Lucky dog! Wish I could do the same. Ta-ta! Can't stop'. A year ago Mr Larkins, with the most pressing engagement in front of him, would have spared me just as much time as I liked to give him. Formerly I woke up (sometimes, it is true, after a restless night) with the feeling that before me lay a day of adventure. I did not know what was in my letters, nor what might happen. Now, when I rose I had nothing to anticipate but fifteen hours of monotony varied only by my meals.

III

1. Point out any lack of coherence in the following sentences, and, where necessary, rewrite the sentences so as to remove this defect:

(a) Wanted: Fish and chip, able to support family.
Wallasey Local Paper

(b) Pram urgently required for tall lady.
Northfields Paper

(c) Chase after sailor with glass mug.
Portsmouth Paper

(d) Gardener requires pruning. Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings. Box ——. *Advertisement*

(e) Comfortable furnished front room to let (with widow). *Advertisement*

2. Improve the following sentences in any way you think necessary:

(a) The pleasures of reading are very great, especially if you are fond of reading, and I am and have been ever since I went to a Dame's school and first learnt the rudiments.

(b) I think far too much time is spent in schools playing games, especially cricket and football, for apart from having to play in the rain and get pneumonia, you might have been learning something really useful that is going to help you earn your bread and butter, instead of kicking a ball about.

(c) Superstitions are silly, because what happens with them might just as well happen without them, seeing that it is all ignorance and Old Wives' Tales, and believing things for which there is no evidence.

IV

Write a paragraph of about half a dozen sentences on each of the following topics:

1. Newspapers
2. Courage
3. Punch and Judy
4. A magic lantern
5. Ink
6. The tiger
7. Pins
8. Bells
9. The hedgehog
10. Presence of mind
11. Absence of mind
12. Mischief
13. Dogs
14. The new moon
15. Milestones
16. Signposts
17. A window-box
18. Proverbs
19. Bees
20. Ice-cream
21. Diaries
22. Fashion
23. Ghosts
24. Fairies
25. Camping out
26. The Zoo
27. Emigration
28. Fishing
29. Gipsies
30. Sunday

IV

COMMON ERRORS IN GRAMMAR

THE ERRORS to be discussed in this section are mainly grammatical errors. One or two of them might have been considered under other headings, but it is convenient to include them here. The items are arranged in alphabetical order.

A

Explanation of some Grammatical Terms

First of all it may be as well to explain the meaning of some of the grammatical terms that will be used in the course of discussing these Common Errors. It is assumed, however, that you know the meaning of such elementary terms as the parts of speech, sentence and phrase, subject and predicate, etc., so the explanations given will be confined to those less familiar terms in which you are most likely to need some help.

1. **Apposition**

When two nouns or noun equivalents stand side by side and both refer to the same person or thing, the two nouns or noun equivalents are said to be in *apposition*: as ,'The prize for putting-the-weight was won by *George the blacksmith'*, where *George* and *blacksmith* are in apposition. The two nouns or noun equivalents are always in the same case.

2. **Case**

The relation in which a noun or pronoun stands to some other word or words in a sentence, or, in an

inflected language, the change in the form of a noun which shows that relation, is called Case. In the sentence 'The man's hat blew off', the relation shown is that of possession, and this relation is indicated by the *—'s* which has been added to *man;* that is by a change in the form of the word, or by inflection, as it is called. Again, in the sentence 'The dog bit the boy', the relation is shown by the order of the words in the sentence. If they were in any other order, the meaning would be quite different.

In English there are five cases:

The Nominative Case, the case of a noun or pronoun when it stands as the subject of a verb; as, '*She* arrives on Boxing Day'

The Vocative Case, the case that is used to address a person or thing; as, 'Now, *sir,* what is your difficulty?'

The Accusative Case, the case of a noun or pronoun when it denotes the direct object of a verb used transitively, or when it is governed by a preposition; as, 'I saw *him* this morning', 'It was *from them* that he heard the news'.

The Genitive Case, the case of a noun or pronoun when it denotes that something belongs to a person or thing; as, 'He had been drinking too much of *Mr Weston's* good wine'.

The Dative Case, the case of a noun or pronoun when it denotes the indirect object of a verb; as, 'He gave *her* a present on her birthday'. Here *her* is the indirect object and *present* the direct object.

The Genitive Case was formerly known as the Possessive Case, and the Accusative Case as the Objective Case, but these terms are now little used.

3. **Clause**

A Clause is a group of words that forms part of a larger sentence, and has a subject and predicate of its own; as, 'The yacht will sail when there is a favourable wind', where 'The yacht will sail' and 'when there is a favourable wind' are clauses.

A Complex Sentence is one that contains a Main Clause and one or more Subordinate Clauses; as, 'Let us go there, if it is not too late'.

A Main Clause is one that contains a main verb, and is not dependent for its meaning upon a word in another clause. 'Let us go there', for instance, in the sentence given above, is a main clause.

A Subordinate Clause is that part of a Complex Sentence that is equivalent to a Noun, an Adjective, or an Adverb, and that has a subject and predicate of its cwn. It therefore depends for its meaning upon a word in some other clause of a Complex Sentence. For example, 'if it is not too late' is a subordinate clause, an adverb clause in this instance, because it modifies *let.* It will therefore be seen that there are three kinds of subordinate clauses: Noun, Adjective, and Adverb.

4. **Complement**

Certain verbs, generally those used intransitively (and called Verbs of Incomplete Predication), do not make complete sense until a word or group of words is added. This word or group of words is called the Complement, and is usually either a noun or a noun equivalent or a predicative adjective; as, 'Barton is the *culprit*', 'Our Siamese cat is *a strange animal*', 'The old shoemaker was *very ill*'.

5. **Correlatives**

Correlatives are words or phrases used together, always in pairs, and so related that one word or phrase

implies the other; as, *either* ... *or*, *neither* ... *nor*, *not only* ... *but also*.

6. Demonstrative Adjective

A Demonstrative Adjective is one that limits the application of a noun to the person or thing pointed out by the adjective; as, '*This* village', '*That* mountain', '*These* sheep'.

7. Demonstrative Pronoun

A Demonstrative Pronoun is one that is used instead of a noun, and that points out some person or thing; as, '*This* is what I mean', '*That* is our house'

8. Distributives

Distributives are those adjectives and pronouns that refer to each individual of a class; as, *each*, *every*, *either*.

9. Ellipsis

Ellipsis is the intentional omission from a sentence of some word or words which are necessary to its complete construction, but which can be readily supplied by the reader; as, 'Charles is learning French, and Tom Spanish', where the words *is learning* are 'understood' after *Tom*.

10. Epithet and Predicative Adjective

When an adjective forms part of the predicate, it is called a Predicative Adjective. When it stands next to the noun it limits, it is called an Epithet Adjective; thus, 'This rose *is red*' (Predicative Adjective), 'This is a *red rose*' (Epithet Adjective).

11. Finite Verb

A Finite Verb is one that has a subject; that is, one that is limited or restricted as regards number and person. For example, in the sentence 'She *made* tea',

the finite verb *made* is limited by the subject *she,* which is third person singular.

12. Future in the Past

The Future in the Past is a tense that is used to describe an action that at some time in the past was regarded as future; as, 'I said that he *would come*'. At some time in the past this would have taken the form, 'I say that he *will come*', where the action is clearly regarded as taking place in the future.

13. Gender

Gender is the classifying of nouns (and pronouns) according to the sex of the objects they denote. In modern English, sex and gender correspond. In some highly inflected foreign languages, however, and even in some not so highly inflected (such as French), sex and gender do not necessarily correspond. It is true that in such languages most males are of the masculine gender and most females of the feminine gender, but nouns that denote lifeless objects are not all of the neuter gender, as in English—some are masculine, some feminine, and some neuter.

14. Gerund and the Participles

The Gerund is a Verb-Noun ending in *-ing*, and names the action of the verb. When formed from a verb used transitively it can be followed by a direct object; as, '*Cycling* is a popular pastime'; 'They like *playing* football'.

A distinction is sometimes made between a gerund and a verbal noun. A gerund, it is said, is transitive and governs a direct object, and a verbal noun does not govern a direct object. But this view is not now generally accepted, both forms being regarded as gerunds.

The Participles are Verb-Adjectives; for if they are the participles of transitive verbs they can govern a noun

or its equivalent in the accusative, and they do the work of adjectives in limiting the application of a noun.

There are two participles:

1. The Present, ending in *-ing;* as, 'They are *coming* to dinner to-morrow'.
2. The Past or Perfect Participle, ending in *-d, -ed, -t, -n,* or *-en;* as, 'He has now *finished* his work'.

15. **Impersonal Verb**

An Impersonal Verb is one in which the source of the action is not indicated. The grammatical subject of the verb is the pronoun *it* used indefinitely; as, '*It* is freezing', '*It*'s a shame', and '*It* was a surprising result'.

16. **Infinitive: Simple and Perfect**

The Simple Infinitive is a noun phrase, and is used as: the subject of a sentence, e.g. '*To err* is human'; the object of a transitive verb, e.g. 'He wished *to come*'; the object of a preposition, e.g. 'There was nothing possible but *to agree*'; the complement of a verb, e.g. 'It appears *to be* the same woman'; a form of exclamation, e.g. '*To think* that this should have happened!'

For the Perfect Infinitive see the explanation given under Common Errors in Grammar, No. 42.

17. **Mood**

Mood is the form of a verb which shows the mode or manner in which a statement is made.

There are four moods:

1. The Indicative Mood is used when a statement is made as a fact, as a question, or as a supposition regarded as a fact; as, 'If he *refuses*, and he certainly will refuse, nothing can be done'.
2. The Imperative Mood is used to express a command as, '*Go* to the ant, thou sluggard'.

3. The Subjunctive Mood is used to express a wish, purpose, or condition, as 'I should do it if I *were* you'.
4. The Infinitive Mood expresses the verbal notion without asserting it of any subject, as '*To think* is not *to act*'.

The Subjunctive Mood is very little used nowadays, the Indicative Mood generally taking its place.

18. **Reflexive and Emphasising Pronouns**

Reflexive Pronouns and Emphasising Pronouns are strengthened forms of the personal pronoun. They should be carefully distinguished. Reflexive Pronouns indicate that the agent acts upon himself, as in, 'He hurt *himself*', the pronoun always being in the accusative case. Emphasising Pronouns are used with the sole object of emphasising a noun or its equivalent, as in, 'He *himself* did it', the emphasising pronoun usually being in apposition to the noun, etc.

19. **Relative Pronoun**

A Relative Pronoun is one that relates to some preceding noun, and is therefore a pronoun, and joins one clause to another, and is therefore a conjunction. It thus performs a double function; as, 'The actor *who* played the part was very weak'; where *who* relates to the noun *actor,* and at the same time joins together the two clauses: 'The actor played the part', 'The actor was very weak'. The preceding noun or pronoun to which the relative refers is called its Antecedent.

There are three relative pronouns: *who*, *which*, and *that*. *Who* is used of persons only, *which* of things only, and *that* of both persons and things.

20. **Transitive and Intransitive Use of Verbs**

A verb is used transitively when it expresses an action

exercised by the doer upon some object; as, *'He built his own house'.*

A verb is used intransitively when it expresses an action which is confined to the doer; 'After a hard day's work in the open air he *slept* very soundly'

21. Subordinating Conjunction

A Subordinating Conjunction is one that joins a dependent clause to a principal clause, or a sub-dependent clause to a dependent clause; as, 'I don't think there's much doubt *that* he will come to see us *when* he returns from abroad'.

The Common Errors now follow.

B

Common Grammatical Errors

1. 'A' or **'An'**?

1. 'The law is **a ass—a idiot'**, said Mr Bumble.

2. The settlement thus effected was **a honourable** one.

3. It was **a historic** occasion.

4. In the end, **an union** took place between the two states.

5. Such **an one** I do remember.

(**An** is used before a word beginning with a vowel, before a silent **h–**, and before an unstressed **h–**; i.e. one in which the word has the accent on the second syllable, as in **habitual.** There is a growing tendency, however, to use **a** instead of **an** before an unstressed **h–**. **A** is used before a word beginning with a consonant, before a vowel that has a consonantal sound, as in **universe,** and before the word **one.** Write, ' "The law is **an ass—an idiot"**, said Mr Bumble'; 'The

settlement thus effected was **an honourable** one'; 'It was **an historic** occasion'; 'In the end, **a union** took place between the two states'; 'Such **a one** I do remember'.)

2. **Agreement of Verb and Subject**

The Chairman, as well as six other members of the Committee, **were** present.

(A verb should agree with its subject in number and person. When two nouns, the former of which is in the singular, are joined by **with, besides, as well as, in addition to,** the verb is in the singular. Write, 'The Chairman, as well as six other members of the Committee, **was** present'.)

Either he or I **are** prepared to help.

(Two singular nouns or pronouns separated by **or** or **nor** should be followed by a verb in the singular. If the subjects are of different numbers or persons, the verb agrees with the nearer subject. Write, 'Either he or I **am** prepared to help'; or, better, 'Either he is prepared to help, or I am'.)

A curious **assortment** of goods **were** to be seen in the shop.

(When a plural noun depends on a preceding singular noun, the verb is sometimes wrongly made to agree with the plural noun next to it. In the sentence given, **assortment,** a noun in the singular, is the real subject of the verb, and this verb should therefore be in the singular also. Write, 'A curious assortment of goods **was** to be seen in the shop'.)

The frenzied mob **was** now seen at **their** worst.

(A collective noun in the singular may be

followed by a verb in the singular or the plural, according as we regard a thing as an undivided whole or as consisting of individuals that compose the whole. But the noun cannot be treated as both singular and plural at the same time. Write, 'The frenzied mob **was** now seen at **its** worst'; or, 'The frenzied mob **were** now seen at **their** worst'.)

The first thing we have to consider **are** the true reasons for his resignation.

(A verb should agree with its subject, not with its complement. Strictly speaking, therefore, we should write, 'The first thing we have to consider **is** the true reasons ... ' As, however, this sounds extremely awkward, the only thing to do is to recast the sentence, and write: 'We first of all have to consider what are the true reasons for his resignation'.)

There's at least four people coming to dinner.

(When an introductory **there** precedes the verb—usually a part of the verb 'to be'—causing inversion of the subject and verb, the verb is apt to be attracted into the singular, although the subject is in the plural. This licence is admissible in speech but should be avoided in writing.)

'Aim' followed by Infinitive

Deliberately, therefore, M. Maurois **aimed to** set the genius of George Sand in a bright light.

(**Aim** should be followed by the gerund, not by the infinitive. Write, 'Deliberately, therefore, M. Maurois **aimed at setting** ... '.)

4. **'Also' as a Conjunction**

They gave him food and drink, **also** a little money.

(**Also** is a true adverb, and cannot be used as a

substitute for the conjunction **and.** Write, 'They gave him food and drink, **and** a little money'.)

5. **'Among' followed by a Singular Noun**

Among the **number** of Shelley's friends was Lord Byron.

(**Among** should always be followed by a plural. Write, 'Among Shelley's friends was Lord Byron'; or, 'Numbered among Shelley's friends was Lord Byron'.)

6. **'And which'**

He bought a new mower, **and which** he found most useful.

(**And which** cannot be used to introduce a relative clause unless another relative clause introduced by **which** has preceded it. Here **and** is redundant. Write, 'He bought a new mower, **which** he found most useful'.)

7. **'Any'** and **'Either'**

I have brought you these **three** books on economics, but I don't suppose that **either** of them is what you really want.

Any of the **two** hotels you mention should suit us.

(**Either** means each of two, and **any** means each of more than two. Write, 'I have brought you these **three** books on economics, but I don't suppose that **any** of them is what you really want'; and **'Either** of the **two** hotels you mention should suit us'.)

8. **Apposition: Wrong Case**

I mean **Tom Richards—he** you saw at our house on Monday.

(In this sentence **Tom Richards** and **he** are in apposition, and should therefore be in the same case, here the accusative. Write, 'I mean **Tom**

Richards—him you saw at our house on Monday'.)

9. '**As follow**' or '**As follows**'?

The details are **as follow.**

(**As follows** is an ellipsis, and means **as it follows,** an impersonal construction. The verb should therefore always be in the singular. Write, 'The details are **as follows**'.)

10. '**As**' for '**That**'

I am quite sure **as** he did it.

(**As** cannot me used to introduce a noun clause. Write, 'I am quite sure **that** he did it'.)

11. '**Between**' and '**Among**'

The two men divided the money **among** them.

The three men divided the money **between** them.

(**Between** is generally used of only two things, **among** of more than two. Write, 'The two men divided the money **between** them', and 'The three men divided the money **among** them'. Sometimes, however, **between** can be used of more than two things; as, 'So far as honesty is concerned, there is not a great deal to choose **between** the three men'.)

12. '**Between each**'

There was a short interval **between each** act.

(This means that there was an interval in the middle of each act, whereas the meaning no doubt intended is that there was an interval at the end of each act, or 'between the acts'.)

13. '**Between . . . or**'

The choice lies **between** honour **or** dishonour.

(We can say, 'The choice lies **between** honour **and**

dishonour', or 'The choice is **either** honour **or** dishonour', but not a mixture of the two.)

14. **'Between you and I'**
Between you and **I** he probably won't come at all.
(**Between** is a preposition, and should be followed by the accusative case. Write, '**Between** you and **me** he probably won't come at all'.)

15. **'But' as a Preposition**
None **but he** could have done it.
(**But** here means **except,** and is therefore a preposition. Hence the pronoun **he,** which is governed by the preposition, should be in the accusative case. Write, 'None **but him** could have done it'.)

16. **'Can' and 'May'**
'**Can** I go to cricket now, sir?'
'You **can**—'
'Thank you, sir'
'But you **may** not'.
(**Can** signifies ability; **may,** permission. **Can** in the first sentence should be **may.**)

17. **'Circumstances'**
In the **circumstances** we will accept your proposal.
Under the **circumstances** we will accept your proposal.
(**Circumstances** means 'things that stand round' and **under the circumstances** has been condemned on the grounds that you cannot be under things that stand round you. But modern usage suggests that, although both of these phrases are correct, **under the circumstances** is the more natural and idiomatic of the two.)

18. **Comparative and Superlative**
A bulldozer can do the **most heaviest** of work.

(This is a double superlative and not good modern English. Write, 'A bulldozer can do the **heaviest** of work'.)

I think that yours is undoubtedly the **best of the two.**
(When only two things are compared the comparative should be used, but in conversation the superlative may stand.)

He was the **meanest** person of **any** in the office.
(**Meanest** is in the superlative degree and implies at least three things; **any** signifies only one. Write, 'He was the meanest person of **all** in the office'; or, as **all** is really redundant, 'He was the meanest person in the office'.)

He was a **meaner** person than any in the office.
(Here the person himself is included in the comparison; that is, the person is meaner than himself, which is nonsense. Write, 'He was a **meaner** person than **any other** in the office'.)

19. **Conjunctions in Wrong Sequence**

The plants were **dearer,** but not as good **as** those you bought.
(**Dearer** is a comparative and must therefore be followed by **than,** and not by **as.** Write, 'The plants were **dearer than,** but not **as good as,** those you bought'; or, better, 'The plants were dearer than those you bought, but not as good'.)

20. **'Considering'**

Considering the circumstances, the plan was a good one.
(As a rule it is an error to use a participle when there is no noun or pronoun with which it can be correctly construed; but a few participles, such as **granting, concerning, considering,** may

be regarded as prepositional in force. The sentence given is therefore correct, and not an example of the unrelated participle.)

21. **Correlatives Wrongly Paired**

What he wanted was **neither** pity **or** patronage.

(The right pairs of correlatives are **neither** **nor**, **either** **or**. Write, 'What he wanted was **neither** pity **nor** patronage'.)

22. **Correlatives Misplaced**

They **not only stole** his watch, **but also his wallet**.

(Each of a pair of correlatives should be placed before the same part of speech. Here **not only** is placed before a verb, where it does not rightly belong, and **but also**, before a noun. Write, 'They stole **not only his watch, but also his wallet**'.)

23. **'Court-martials'**

Two **court-martials** were held on the same day

(The plural of **court-martial** is **courts-martial**.)

24. **'Didn't ought'**

He **didn't ought** to say that.

(**Ought** is the weak past of owe, and is now used as a present only. It cannot be used as an infinitive or as a past participle. Write, 'He **oughtn't** to say that', or, 'He **shouldn't** say that'.)

25. **'Didn't use'**

They **didn't use** to do it.

(This is old-fashioned, but not incorrect in conversation. In written work it is better avoided. Write, 'They **usedn't** to do it', or, 'They **used not** to do it'. Note, however, that 'didn't **used**' is wrong.)

26. **'Different than'**

My explanation is quite **different than** yours.

(**Than** should be used with a comparative only. Write, 'My explanation is quite different **from** yours'.)

27. **Distributives Wrongly Used with Plural**

Neither of the thieves **were** caught.

(The distributives **each, every, either, neither,** should be followed by a verb in the singular. Write, '**Neither** of the thieves **was** caught'.)

28. **Double Negative**

He **won't** agree now, I **don't** suppose.

(In English, two negatives make an affirmative, so that this sentence means, 'I suppose he **will** agree now', which is not the meaning intended. Write, 'He won't agree now, I **suppose**'.)

29. **Double Possessive**

Jane was a friend **of Mary's.**

(This is a double possessive and is sometimes defended on the ground that it means 'A friend of Mary's friends'. At all events, it has now become a well-established idiom.)

30. **'Due to'** and **'Owing to'**

Due to the bad weather, **the match** could not be played.

(**Due** is here an adjective and limits **match,** which makes nonsense. Write, **'Owing to** the bad weather, the match could not be played', where **owing to** is a compound preposition governing **weather.**)

31. **'Each Other'** and **'One Another'**

The **two** boys were showing **one another** their Christmas presents.

Most of the people were **blaming each other** for what had happened.

(**Each other** is generally **used of only** two things, and **one another** of more **than two**. There is, however, a growing **tendency for** writers to ignore this distinction.)

32. **Ellipsis of Part of Verb**

He never **has** and he never **will do such a thing**.

(In this sentence **will** is correctly followed by the infinitive, but **has** should be followed by a past participle. Write, 'He never **has done** and he never **will do** such a thing'.)

33. **Emphasising Pronoun as Subject of Verb**

Myself alone will do it.

Dick and **myself** will be sitting for the same examination.

(An emphasising pronoun cannot be used as the subject, or one of the subjects, of a sentence. Write, '**I** alone will do it', and 'Dick and **I** will be sitting for the same examination'.)

34. **'Except'** and **'Without'**

You'll miss the train **without** you hurry.

She won't do anything **except** she gets paid for it.

(Neither **without** nor **except** can be used as a conjunction. Write, 'You'll miss the train **unless** you hurry', and 'She won't do anything **unless** she gets paid for it'.)

35. **'Few'** and **'A Few'**

The test given was unusually difficult, and **a few** candidates were successful.

(**A few** means **some, few** means **not many.** Write, 'The test given was unusually difficult, and **few** candidates were successful'.)

36. **Future instead of Present**

I **shall have** much pleasure in accepting your kind invitation to dinner on Tuesday next.

(Write, '**I have** much pleasure in accepting your kind invitation to dinner on Tuesday next'. The pleasure of the acceptance is in the present, not in the future.)

37. **Gender**

Her house was always untidy, and it was quite evident that the woman was a **sloven.**

(**Sloven** is the masculine form. The corresponding feminine form is **slut** or **slattern.**)

On the way to the market the **heifer** broke loose, but it was not long before **he** was recaptured.

(**Heifer** is a feminine form. The corresponding masculine form is **bullock** or **steer.**)

The **count** and countess belonged to the old English aristocracy.

(There is no such English title as **count.** The correct masculine form is **earl.**)

A **charlady** came in every day to help with the work.

(The correct form of the word is **charwoman.** There is no corresponding masculine form.)

38. **Genitive Case Wrongly Used**

Frank's and **Mary's** father has now returned from abroad.

(The genitive of compound nouns is formed by adding **'s** to the second noun. Write, '**Frank** and **Mary's** father has now returned from abroad'.)

The **box's contents** were of no value.

(The use of the genitive case, in modern English,

is restricted to certain kinds of nouns; mostly those denoting living things, personifications, and space, time, or weight. Write, 'The **contents of the box** were of no value'.)

He passed **St James'** Palace every day.

(If the final -s of a noun in the genitive case is sounded, it should be included in the spelling of the word. Write, 'He passed **St James's** Palace every day'.)

Ulysses's voyage was a memorable one.

They did it for **appearance's** sake.

(Where there would be a succession of three -s sounds, if the full inflected form of the genitive were used, the genitive is usually formed by adding an apostrophe only. Write, **'Ulysses'** voyage was a memorable one', and 'They did it for **appearance'** sake'.)

She bought her meat at **West's,** the **butcher's,** shop.

(When two nouns in apposition are in the genitive case, each should, strictly speaking, take the genitive inflection. But this, although grammatically correct, is unidiomatic, and only one of the nouns, usually the second, should be inflected. Write, 'She bought her meat at **West** the **butcher's** shop'.)

It was somebody **else's** mistake.

(**Else** is an adverb, and means **besides, in addition,** and cannot be in the genitive case or any other case. Grammatically the phrase should be **somebody's else;** but no one would venture to say that. **Somebody else's,** however, has now become a well-established idiom, and can be regarded as correct.)

39. **Gerund Confused with Present Participle**

I wonder at **him behaving** like that.

I wonder at **his behaving** like that.

(A gerund is a verb-noun and a participle a verb-adjective. 'I wonder at **him behaving** like that', means that I wonder at the **man himself** when he is behaving like that, and **behaving** is a participle. 'I wonder at **his behaving** like that' means that I wonder at the man's **action** in behaving like that, and **behaving** is a gerund. The gerundial meaning is almost invariably intended, even when the participle construction is mistakenly used, so that the second of these versions is the one that should be preferred.)

40. **'Hardly than'** and **'Scarcely than'**

Hardly had he begun the work **than** he was taken ill.

The match had **scarcely** started **than** it began to rain.

(**Than** should be used after a comparative only. Write, **'Hardly** had he begun the work **when** he was taken ill', and 'The match had **scarcely** started **when** it began to rain'.)

41. **'I and James'**

I and James will be going to see the film this afternoon.

(If the pronoun **I** forms part of a double subject, it should, for reasons of courtesy, be placed second. Write, **'James and I** will be going to see the film this afternoon'.)

42. **Infinitive—Simple and Perfect**

He would have liked **to have stayed.**

He **seemed to have enjoyed** himself at the dance.

They **intended to have returned** last month.

(The perfect infinitive is used after verbs of **saying**,

seeming, supposing, believing, knowing, etc. to indicate that an event happened prior to the time denoted by the finite verb; and after verbs expressing **hope, wish, intention, expectation, duty,** etc. to indicate that the **hope, wish, intention,** etc. was not realised. In the first of these sentences we have a double-past construction, where a perfect infinitive, **to have stayed,** follows a tense that is itself perfect in the past—**would have liked.** This usage is incorrect. The infinitive should be the simple present. Write, 'He would have liked **to stay'.** In the second sentence there is a mixture of two constructions, **'He seems to have enjoyed** himself at the dance', and **'He seemed to enjoy** himself at the dance', either of which is correct, according to the exact meaning intended. As regards the third sentence, some grammarians have taken exception to this construction on the ground that the 'unfulfilled intention' is sufficiently expressed by the main verb; but the construction is sanctioned by usage.)

43. **'Inningses'**

Hutton, in his two **inningses,** made a total of 120 runs.

(**Innings** can be either singular or plural, but its form remains unchanged. Thus we can say, 'Hutton played a good **innings'**, or 'Hutton, in his two innings, made a total of 120 runs'. **Inningses** is sometimes loosely used in familiar conversation.)

44. **Interrogative Pronoun in Wrong Case**

Who was the bag given to?

Whom do you think will win?

(In the first sentence the interrogative pronoun **who** is governed by the preposition **to**, and

should therefore be in the accusative case; i.e. **who** should be **whom.** In the second sentence **whom** is the subject of **will win,** and should be in the nominative case; i.e. **whom** should be **who.** In conversation, **who** for **whom** is usually permissible.)

45. **'I would like'**

I would like to go to Paris in June.

(The Future in the Past is subject to the same rules as the simple future: **should** is used in the first person and **would** in the second and third. Write, **'I should like** to go to Paris in June'.)

46. **'Lay'** and **'Lie'**

1. He **lays** in bed every Sunday morning.
2. They let him **lay** where he had fallen.
3. **Lay** down, Walter, and go to sleep.
4. When the enemy began to fire he **laid** down.
5. Full of hate, he **laid** in wait for the spy.
6. The hens have **lain** six eggs.

(**Lay** and **lie** are two verbs that are often confused, so that the following points should be carefully noted.—**Lay** is a transitive verb, and its chief parts are: Present Tense, **I lay;** Past Tense, **I laid;** Past Participle, **laid. Lie** is an intransitive verb, and its chief parts are: Present Tense, **I lie;** Past Tense, **I lay;** Past Participle, **lain.** The mistake that is usually made is that of confusing **lay** with **lie;** that is, the present tense of the transitive verb **lay** with the present tense of the intransitive verb **lie.** Write, 'He **lies** in bed every Sunday morning', 'They let him **lie** where he had fallen', **'Lie** down, Walter, and go to sleep', 'When the enemy began to fire he **lay** down', 'Full of hate, he **lay** in wait for the spy' 'The hens have **laid** six eggs'.)

47. **'Less'** and **'Fewer'**

No cabin had **less** than six passengers.

(**Less** is used of quantity, **fewer** of number; e.g. 'Less bacon', 'fewer eggs'. Write, 'No cabin had **fewer** than six passengers'.)

48. **'Lighted'** and **'Lit'**

She **lighted** the fire.
She **lit** the fire.
She has **lighted** the fire.
She has **lit** the fire.
He had a **lighted** torch in his hands.
He had a **lit** torch in his hands.

(The forms **lighted** and **lit** are, in most cases, alternatives. We can say either, 'She **lighted** the fire' or 'She **lit** the fire', 'She has **lighted** the fire' or 'She has **lit** the fire', although there is a slight tendency for writers to prefer **lit** for the past tense and **lighted** for the past participle. When the past participle is used as an epithet adjective, as in the last example, the form **lighted** should be chosen.)

49. **'Like' as a Conjunction**

If you think you are going to behave **like** he does, you are mistaken.

(**Like** can be used as a noun, 'Have you ever seen her **like?'**; an adjective, 'She is certainly **like** her mother'; a verb, 'They **like** listening to good music'; but it cannot be used as a conjunction. Write, 'If you think you are going to behave **as** he does, you are mistaken'; or 'If you think you are going to behave **in the way that** he does, you are mistaken'. In spoken English, however, **like** as a conjunction is very frequently heard.)

50. **'Many a'**

Many a year **have** passed since that golden time.

There **have** been **many a** better poet than Alfred Austin.

(**Many a** is virtually a distributive and therefore singular, so that the verb of which it is the subject should be singular. Write, 'Many a year **has** passed since that golden time', and 'There **has** been many a better poet than Alfred Austin'.)

51. **'Means'**

It was by **these means** that he succeeded in his purpose.

(**Means** is a singular noun and the demonstrative adjective should agree with it. Write, 'It was by **this means** that he succeeded in his purpose'.)

52. **Moods in Wrong Sequence**

I **shall** be glad if you **would** return the book I lent you.

(In a conditional sentence both verbs are either in the Indicative Mood or in the Subjunctive Mood. Write, either, 'I **shall** be glad if you **will** return the book I lent you', or, 'I **should** be glad if you **would** return the book I lent you')

53. **'More than he can help'**

He won't do **more** work **than he can help.**

(The real meaning is that he won't do more work than he **cannot** help. But the phrase **can help,** although illogical, has become an idiom.)

54. **'More than one'**

More than one ship **were** sunk in the battle that followed.

(**More than one** is singular and the verb should agree with it. Write, **'More than one** ship **was** sunk in the battle that followed'.)

55. **Nominative instead of Accusative after Transitive Verb**

Will you help Charles and **I** to put things right?

(**I** is one of the direct objects of the transitive verb **help**, and should therefore be **me.**)

56. **'None is'** or **'None are'?**

None of the results **is** entirely satisfactory.

None of the results **are** entirely satisfactory.

(**None** is a contraction of **no one** and was originally always used in the singular. Now it is more often used in the plural, but both versions may be regarded as correct.)

57. **Nouns ending in -y preceded by a Vowel**

The **donkies** stubbornly refused to move.

(If a noun ends in –y, and the **–y** is preceded by a vowel, the plural is formed by adding **–s** to the singular. Write, 'The **donkeys** stubbornly refused to move'.)

58. **'One' followed by 'He', etc.**

One can't always do what **he** would like.

(An indefinite demonstrative pronoun cannot be followed by a definite demonstrative. Write, **'One** can't always do what **one** would like'; or, more idiomatically, **'We** can't always do what **we** should like', where **we** is used as an indefinite pronoun.)

59. **'Only' in Wrong Position**

She **only** saw him once a week.

(An adverb should be placed as near as possible to the word it modifies. The word that **only** here modifies is **once.** Hence we should write, 'She saw him **only** once a week'. But a good deal of latitude is allowed in regard to the

position of only, so long as no ambiguity is involved.)

60. **'Other . but'**

There is no **other** reason **but** the one I have already given.

(**Other,** which is really a comparative, should be followed by **than** and not by **but.** Write, 'There is no **other** reason **than** the one I have already given'.)

61. **'Pailsful'** or **'Pailfuls'?**

Dick fetched two **pailsful** of water from the well.

(The plural of **pailful** is **pailfuls,** not **pailsful** or **pails full.** Write, 'Dick fetched two **pailfuls** of water from the well'.)

62. **'Physics',** etc.

Physics were optional.

(**Physics** is the name of one subject, and therefore singular. Write, **'Physics was** optional'. So with similar words: **classics, politics,** etc.. But where nouns of this kind are used in a more general way, and are preceded by such words as **his, her, their,** and **the,** they are then treated as plural; e.g. 'In those days the **classics were** invariably studied at the university.)

63. **'Prefer than'**

The girl said that she **preferred** the blue coat **than** the black.

(**Prefer** should be followed by **to** not by **than.** As we have seen, **than** is used after a comparative only.)

64. **Preposition at End of Sentence**

Mathematics is not a subject I am interested **in.**

What are they talking **about?**

I don't know where he is going **to.**

(A preposition is unemphatic and should not as a rule be placed at the end of a sentence, if it sounds equally natural when placed elsewhere. The first sentence could be rewritten, 'Mathematics is not a subject in which I am interested', without the least awkwardness resulting. But in the other two sentences the preposition should be left where it is.)

65. **Prepositions in Wrong Sequence**

This frankness did not **detract** but rather added **to** his popularity.

(**Detract** cannot be followed by **to,** the preposition 'understood' after **detract.** Write, 'This frankness did not **detract from** but rather added **to** his popularity'.)

66. **'Quite' misused**

Her acting created **quite** a sensation.

(**Quite** is an adverb and cannot be used, at all events in written work, to modify a noun. In spoken English, however, this licence is permissible. Write, 'Her acting created a great sensation', 'a remarkable sensation' or any similar construction.)

67. **Relative after 'Same'**

These curtains are the **same** colour **as** those you have.

Is it the **same** man **who** brought the wood?

(The relative to be used after **same** is **as** or **that,** not **who.** Hence the first sentence is correct. For the second sentence write, 'Is it the **same** man **that** brought the wood?')

68. **Relative 'As'**

That is the car **as** I am going to buy.

(**As** cannot be used as a relative unless **it** is preceded by **the same, such,** or another **as.** Write, 'This is the car **that** I am going to buy'; or, simply, 'This is the car I am going to buy'.)

69. **Relative: Lack of Agreement**

'The Grapes', Limehouse, is one of the old Thames-side inns **that has** remained almost unaltered for centuries.

(A relative pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and person. In the sentence given, the relative pronoun **that,** the subject of the verb in the dependent clause, should **agree** with its antecedent **inns,** which is third person plural. Hence the verb of which it is subject should be third person plural; that is, **has** should be **have.**)

70. **Relative Pronoun in Wrong Case**

The crime had been committed by a man **whom** it afterwards appeared was insane.

(Although a relative pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and person, its case depends upon its construction in its own clause. Here the relative pronoun is the subject of the verb **was** and should therefore be in the nominative; in other words **whom** should be **who.** 'It afterwards appeared' is parenthetical. Write, 'The crime had been committed by a man who, it afterwards appeared, was insane'.)

71. **'Rhinoceri'** or **'Rhinoceroses'?**

A herd of **rhinoceri** charged the hunters.

(The plural of **rhinoceros** is **rhinoceroses.** Write, 'A herd of **rhinoceroses** charged the hunters'.)

72. **'Shall'** and **'Will'**

1. I **will** be happy to attend the meeting on Monday.

2. He **shall** be drowned, if he is not careful.
3. I **shall** give you fifty pounds for the cameo.
4. **Will** I be in time, do you think?
5. You **will** have a cheque by return.
6. I say that you **will** do as I tell you.

(**Shall** is used in the first person to express simple futurity; in the first and second to express interrogation; in the second and third to express promise; in all three persons to express compulsion.—**Will** is used in the first person to express promise; in the second and third to express simple futurity or interrogation; in all three persons to express determination. Change **will** to **shall** in sentence No. 1, **shall** to **will** in sentences Nos. 2 and 3, **will** to **shall** in sentences Nos. 4, 5, and 6.)

73. **'Somewhat superfluous'**

Many of these descriptive adjectives are **somewhat superfluous.**

(**Superfluous** is a word used in an absolute sense, and cannot be qualified. Write, 'Many of these descriptive adjectives are **superfluous**'.)

74. **Split Infinitive**

It was difficult for him **to completely understand** the subject.

(In English the infinitive is often preceded by **to.** 'To split' an infinitive is to place an adverb between this **to** and the rest of the verb, as in the example given. This is accounted a fault. The infinitive, however, is sometimes split by good writers because in that way they can gain some special effect; but we advise you not to split the infinitive unless there is a distinct gain in doing so. Here there is no such gain. Write, 'It was difficult for him **to understand** the subject completely'.)

75. **'Strata'**

While prospecting, the men discovered a **strata** of gold.

(**Strata** is a plural form. In this sentence the singular form **stratum** is required.)

76. **Tenses in Wrong Sequence**

She said that she **is tired** of the work she **had done**.
The master said that the world **was** round.
The boy explained that he **was** taller than his brother.

(A past tense in the principal clause should be followed by a past tense in the dependent clause, unless the verb in the dependent clause expresses an habitual action, or a permanent truth, or contains a comparison. After a comparison either a present or past tense can be used according to the sense intended. The sentences given should therefore be changed to: 'She said that she **was** tired of the work she had done', 'The master said that the world **is** round', and 'The boy explained that he **is** taller than his brother', if the reference is to the present.)

77. **'Than whom'**

It was written by Shakespeare, **than whom** there is no greater poet.

(**Than** is a subordinating conjunction implying comparison, and the nouns or pronouns compared should be in the same case, here the nominative. **Than whom** should therefore really be **than who.** However, **than,** in this construction, is regarded by many writers as a preposition governing the relative pronoun in the accusative case, and therefore good English.)

78. **'That'** for **'So'**

He was **that conceited** that no one liked him.

(**That** cannot be used as an adverb; the word

required here is **so.** Write, 'He was **so conceited** that no one liked him'.)

79. **'That'** for **'In Which'** or **'When'**

It happened in the year **that** he was born.

(**That** should here be **in which** or **when,** as can be seen if we substitute **which** for **that**: 'It happened in the year which he was born', where an **in** has obviously been omitted. Write, 'It happened in the year **in which** he was born'; or, preferably, 'It happened in the year **when** he was born'.)

80. **'That' Wrongly Omitted**

I thought he would ultimately agree, and **that** the matter could be settled in a friendly manner.

(**That** should not be omitted from the former of two noun clauses which are the direct objects of the verb. Write, 'I thought **that** he would ultimately agree, and **that** the matter could be settled in a friendly manner'.)

81. **'Them'** for **'Those'**

Where did you put **them** papers?

(A demonstrative pronoun cannot be used as a demonstrative adjective. Write, 'Where did you put **those** papers?')

82. **'Then' as an Adjective**

It was Mr Gladstone, the **then premier,** who made this famous remark.

(This adjectival use of **then** should be avoided. Write, 'It was Mr Gladstone, **at that time premier**, who made this famous remark'.)

83. **'The same'**

The goods have now arrived and we will send **the same** to you without delay.

(This is 'commercial English', and frequently found in business letters. **Same** or **the same** should not be used as a substitute for a pronoun that refers to some previous noun. Write, 'The goods have now arrived and we will send **them** to you without delay'.)

84. **'The Two First', 'The Three First'**, etc.

Which were **the two first** novels of Dickens?

(There were no **two first** novels of Dickens. Write, 'Which were the **first two** novels of Dickens?' The **two first,** however, is not always wrong. A pupil can win **two first** prizes at school; one, say, for French, and one for English.)

85. **'Those kind', 'These sort',** etc.

We certainly don't want **those kind** of neighbours.

What does he mean by sending us **these sort** of things?

(The demonstrative adjectives **this** and **that** should agree in number with the nouns they limit. **Kind** and **sort** are singular, and therefore, strictly speaking, we should say **that kind** and **this sort**, and write, 'We certainly don't want **that kind of neighbour'**, or **'neighbours of that kind'**; and 'What does he mean by sending us **this sort of thing?'** or **'things of this sort'**, according to the exact meaning. Some writers, however, regard **these sort of things** as a group plural, while others consider it to be a well-established idiom'.)

86. **'To be' followed by Wrong Case**

It's **me.**

(The subject and the complement of any part of the verb 'to be' must be in the same case. Hence in accordance with this rule, 'It's **me**' should be 'It's **I**'. But 'It's **me**' is now used by

so many educated people that it has become an idiom. None the less, some, who are not merely purists, still prefer to say, 'It's **I**'.)

It's **him.**

(Here again, as **it** is in the nominative its complement **him** should be in the nominative; i.e. **him** should be **he,** and this most people would accept. But although 'It's **him'** has not yet become an idiom, it is tending that way.)

That's **them.**

(According to the strict rules of grammar, there is not a word in this sentence that is correct. **That** should be plural, **is** should be plural, and **them** should be in the nominative. Making all these corrections we get 'Those are they'. But this is felt to be stilted and self-conscious 'correctness', and better avoided. We must therefore try to find some paraphrase, such as 'Here they are', or 'Those are the people', etc., to take its place.)

They believed it to be **he.**

(Here the pronoun **it,** which is in the accusative, is combined with the infinitive **to be** to form a noun phrase which is a direct object of **believed.** Now as we have seen, the verb 'to be' takes the same case after it as before it, and as **it** is here in the accusative **he** must be in the accusative also; i.e. **he** should be **him.**)

87. **Unrelated Participle**

Crossing the line at the station, a **train** knocked him down.

(As the participle is an adjective, there must be some noun or noun-equivalent that it limits. If this noun or noun-equivalent is omitted, we

have the error of the **Unrelated Participle**, or the **Unattached Participle** as it is sometimes called. Further, the general rule is that if the participle has no noun or noun-equivalent of its own with which it can be construed, it belongs to the subject of the main verb. The error usually consists in this subject of the main verb to which the participle grammatically belongs not being the noun or noun-equivalent to which it really belongs. In the sentence given, for instance, the only noun with which the participle can be construed is **train,** the subject of the main verb **knocked down.** But this is obviously not its real subject. '**Crossing the line** . a **train** ' makes nonsense. Write, '**Crossing** the line at the station **he** was knocked down by a train'; or, 'As **he** was crossing the line at the station, **he** was knocked down by a train'.)

88. **'Very' Qualifying a Past Participle**

They were **very hurt** by his remarks.

They were **much tired** after their journey.

(When should a past participle be modified by **very** and when by **much?** The determining point here is that **very,** being an adverb of degree, cannot modify a verb. Hence if the participle still retains its verbal force it should be modified by **much.** If it has become a pure adjective it should be modified by **very.** In the examples given the participle **hurt** retains its verbal force and **tired** does not. Write, 'They were **much hurt** by his remarks', and 'They were **very tired** after their journey'.)

89. **'Was when'**

The most important day in her life **was when** she married.

(**When** should not be used after **was** to introduce

a clause that would be the complement of the sentence. Write, 'The most important day in her life was her marriage-day'.)

EXERCISES ON COMMON ERRORS IN GRAMMAR

I

Rewrite each of the following sentences correctly, giving reasons for the corrections you make:

1. The number of people who attended were remarkable.
2. Why don't they try and find out who really did it?
3. Whom do you suppose will go to the meeting?
4. I shall come and see you in a few days time.
5. No one is better at bowling than him.
6. The dog was laying down quietly.
7. They won't catch the train, without they hurry.
8. He ought to have let Jack and I do it.
9. He was the cleverest boy of any in the whole school.
10. Who do they intend to give the order to?
11. The details you require are as follow.
12. He only paid five shillings for it.
13. Every one of them were completely exhausted by the long march.
14. The new manager was in many ways different to the old.
15. He gave us a shilling to divide between the four of us.
16. It is doubtful if those kind of people are ever to be relied upon.
17. Fancy him winning the race after all.
18. She ultimately succeeded wihout them helping her at all.

19. Rowing close to the bank, the boat was capsized.
20. I have often wondered why he acts like he does.
21. One gets used to cold water when they go in every day.
22. French as well as German were taught.
23. Between each tree there was a distance of about thirty yards.
24. Scarcely had she closed the door than there was another ring at the bell.
25. I think this box is squarer than the one you have.

II

Correct each of the following sentences, giving reasons for the corrections you make:

1. Any one of us may make a mistake, which we are sorry for, and has bitter consequences.
2. Judging from the time taken, the race was rowed quicker than in all previous years.
3. He never does more than he can help.
4. Neither of the children reached their homes after their many wanderings.
5. Nothing that you or he have said seems to directly bear on the question.
6. A courtier in the time of Elizabeth I, whose father having died early, he was left the charge of a younger brother Robert to whom he was almost a father.
7. I conceived a great regard for him, and could not but mourn for his loss.
8. That he was willing to have made his peace with Walpole is admitted by Mr Scott.
9. There goes John with both his dogs on either side of him.
10. Another attraction was the little white house of Meissonier, of whom they are so justly proud, and which stands nearly opposite the church.

11. It is of Dickens and of his characters of whom we think most frequently when we are in Southwark.
12. Pierre came back in a few days to see how Shon was, and expressed his determination of staying to help Sir Duke, if need be.
13. If he had entertained less disparaging notions of his predecessors, one may perceive in Bacon himself that many of the flaws which here and there disfigure his writing would have vanished.
14. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities.
15. To this moment I am utterly ignorant of any contributors to whom they either have or were called upon to pay money.
16. Some there are, who, though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves, and account future times impertinences.
17. I cannot, of course, dispute with an opponent who reads what I write with so little attention.
18. A wretched woman, whom there is every reason to believe was insane, made a furious, but happily unsuccessful attempt on the King's life; and the King behaved with a courage which revolutionised all who saw his conduct or heard of it in his favour.
19. An ordinary reader would scarcely suppose that Shadwell who is here meant by MacFlecknoe, was worth being chastised, and that Dryden, descending to such game, was like an eagle stooping to catch flies.
20. Neither my friend nor I myself are able to decide as to whom the unknown correspondent may be.
21. It has been my intention to have called upon you when in town, but the astonishing variety of sights have usurped my time.

22. Few candidates knew enough of the nature of discount as to be aware that the charge for discounting a bill is calculated on the period between the date of the transaction and that of the maturity of the bill.
23. Jeffreys was an exaggerated example of the acute but vulgar criminal lawyer, of which there have been plenty since his time.
24. Being in his company the other day our conversation turned upon adventures that has happened actually by field and flood and one he told he vouched for the truth of.
25. One thing that makes Arnold's poetry so picturesque is because he always chooses his epithets with such judgment.
26. As the leading journal of this county, I am sure that the voice of injustice will not be denied a small portion of your space, as leading journals elsewhere do.
27. Put one of the pills in a little water, and swallow it three times daily before meals.
28. I certainly love him more than any human being, and neither time or distance have had the least effect on my (in general) changeable disposition.
29. Wallace was not only the creator of a new kind of army, but of a nation—one of the most vigorous nations which has ever played a part in the conflicts of the world.
30. With some men, their mass of wealth, together with their social influence and freedom from trivial cares, are excuse sufficient for grievous wrong-doing.
31. What really kept him at home was not so much the plague, then raging in the East, more violently than usual, but the still embarrassed state of his fortunes.
32. Do not be too ready to believe strange stories from those whom you know are not the essence of

sobriety and truth.

33. Driving down the street, the horse ran off, and he was thrown out of the machine.
34. She is one of those women who cannot conceal her opinions about what she considers to be wrong.
35. When out at sea in a vessel the horizon is always circular.
36. I never remember to have stated my opinion verbally, though I have expressed it in writing.
37. The whole controversy centred round the question as to whether political speeches should be broadcasted, but none of the disputants seemed to know their own mind.
38. Entering the drawing-room the conviction came to him that he was in the dwelling of an individual of refined taste.
39. He hurriedly departed, leaving uncompleted many things he had intended to have done.
40. No man can read Scott without being more of a public man, whereas the ordinary novel tends to make its readers rather less of one than before.
41. But, whatever his faults, not his worst enemy could accuse Dr Nevington of being a respecter of persons unless he was well assured beforehand whom such persons might be.
42. He proved that he had read it, because he showed a knowledge of facts that could only be gained by having done so.
43. He need have no fear about his future prospects, though he needs both time and money to complete his invention.
44. I am not sure that yours and my efforts would suffice separately, but yours and mine together cannot possibly fail.
45. The railway has done all and more than was expected of it.
46. The soldiers were too exhausted to take the proper

care they ought of their horses.

47. He ate the black and white puddings, and declared he was one of those who never hesitate to gratify his desires when opportunity offers.
48. I intended to have gone to London as soon if not sooner than you.
49. Even when one has a thorough knowledge of a subject, he can seldom fall into the best plan of communicating it without previous reflection.
50. I then further observed that, China having observed the laws of neutrality, how could he believe in the possibility of an alliance with Russia?

III

Make any necessary corrections in the following sentences, giving reasons for the corrections you make:

1. (a) He doubted the possibility of any banker being able to raise the required loan.
   (b) I experienced rather a unique pleasure the other day.
   (c) Life in the town or country has its advantages and disadvantages.
   (d) It was his intention to have travelled from Cologne to Mayence, but he was compelled to return home.

2. (a) Being built on the site of an old cemetery, no true Jew could enter Tiberias without ceremonial pollution.
   (b) Around her there gravitates a small collection of idle persons.
   (c) Among the exponents and advocates of the Protectionists is Mr Underwood, who, if he be not a Cobdenite, then it may be asked, what is Cobdenism?

(d) It was evident that no precautions were taken that the disaster might have been prevented.

3. (a) Early in the following year the Fitzgeralds bought a place in the country, where they resided a good deal for the future.
   (b) He had invented a continual process for manufacturing nitric acid.
   (c) There's the first of the visitors; I wonder whom it is.
   (d) One friend she had who would have rejoiced to have been of the least assistance to her.

4. (a) Passing by the damaged house, a brick was dislodged and fell on my shoulder.
   (b) There could be no doubt but what, taking all the circumstances into account, he acted quite friendly.
   (c) Brown spoke sharply: Smith retorted: and neither of them were sparing of reflections on one another.
   (d) Many persons give evident proof that either they do not feel the power of the principles of religion, or that they do not believe them.

5. (a) Carlyle's *Heroes* are a grand work; if we but look within we shall be richly rewarded by its perusal.
   (b) It is only a week since I was there, and nothing could have been further from my thoughts than that this little house would be wrecked by the bombs of assassins.
   (c) The ransom of a man's life are his riches.
   (d) Neither in writing for the learned or the general reader was he very successful.

6. (a) They had the readiest ear for a bold honourable sentiment, of any class of men the world ever produced.

(b) Although few climbers fear to venture on peaks equally as steep, their pulses quicken and their lips blanch when standing on this knife edge with a drop of thousands of feet on either side.

(c) With respect to provincial plate, many pieces exist long after 1300, which are stamped with the maker's mark alone.

(d) I will not state them in my own language, but in the language of one, the poetical charm of whose mind and style have perhaps a little overclouded his reputation as a political philosopher.

7. (a) When it was my pleasure to address a meeting of over two thousand at the Royal Theatre, the opposition numbered less than seven score.

(b) I hope the day is far distant when politicians will be guided less by the needs of their party than by the good of the nation, or that the electors will prefer to have their opinions ready made than to judge for themselves.

(c) I no more object to a whole new clause than these kind of amendments framed to disarm opposition, and which may be consequently accepted.

(d) I saw the man whom you said was my brother, though he did not see me.

8. (a) There is a defect in the mechanism, which I cannot easily explain to you what is wrong.

(b) The King, accompanied by the Prince and his friends, were alone in the enclosure.

(c) Some of this tea was presented to us, and the delicious flavour and aroma of the same is deeply engraved or engrafted on the tablets of our mental organisation and the heart of our memory.

(d) The picture of the village pastor in this poem, which we have already printed, was taken in part from the character of his father, embodied likewise recollections of his brother Henry.

9. (a) I wonder that you waste the time which we might spend happily together by listening to the fellow's insults.
   (b) He is good-looking and good-mannered, but one of those impulsive men that says just what he thinks.
   (c) Riding on horseback, the day passed pleasantly
   (d) The statement was incorrect, as anyone acquainted with American engines, and who has seen the engines in question, will testify.

10. (a) I have now the perfect use of all my limbs, except my left arm which I can hardly tell what is the matter with it.
    (b) Edinburgh has good fortifying purposes, being surrounded by hills, and such places as the house where John Knox lived, etc., are very interesting, and everyone flocks to see them.
    (c) He explained he had no money troubles, but following blood-poison periodically got depressed. He always meant to have kept straight, and would try and be steady in future.
    (d) That this practice has the highest of all sanctions is proved by the preface to the first edition of Shakespeare, where editors say of him, 'His mind and hand went together; and what he thought he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers'

V

COMMON ERRORS IN PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is the use, in the written language, of what are called Stops; that is, certain marks or signs which, when inserted into a sentence in their proper places, help to make its meaning clear to the reader. Now the ease with which the reader grasps the writer's meaning depends largely upon the correct grouping of words in a sentence. In spoken English this grouping is indicated by various pauses and inflections of the voice; in written English, where such guidance is of necessity lacking, the same purpose is served by the use of stops.

But when it is said that punctuation is an aid to clearness of expression, this does not mean that stops are to be regarded as a cure for uncertainty of meaning arising from a badly constructed sentence; it should be our aim, as far as possible, to make our meaning clear without the help of stops. The particular kind of clearness meant is that which consists in making the mutual relations of the several parts of a sentence so plain that the reader can see at a glance the exact construction intended. If stops are required to amend, instead of to display, the construction, it is generally a sign that the sentence should be recast.

Some Examples

Here is a sentence from which the internal stops have been omitted:

> Nothing in Marlboroughs career is more admirable than the unwearied patience the inimitable skill the

courtesy the tact the self command with which he employed himself during many years in reconciling the incessant differences overcoming the incessant opposition and soothing the incessant jealousies of those with whom he was compelled to cooperate.

Here is the same sentence with the internal stops put in:

> Nothing in Marlborough's career is more admirable than the unwearied patience, the inimitable skill, the courtesy, the tact, the self-command with which he employed himself during many years in reconciling the incessant differences, overcoming the incessant opposition, and soothing the incessant jealousies of those with whom he was compelled to co-operate.

There can be no question that the second version is much easier to understand than the first; and this result has been attained by marking off the related words into their proper groups with the aid of stops.

Take another example:

> There was a drawbridge in the middle, which William Walworth, the mayor, caused to be raised to prevent their coming into the city; but they soon terrified the citizens into lowering it again, and spread themselves, with great uproar, over the streets.

Here the meaning is made easier to gather because the sentence has been first of all divided into two main parts by means of a semicolon, and then each of these main parts has been divided into subordinate parts by means of commas.

Again, consider the following:

> In the equatorial forests the aspect is the same, or nearly so, every day in the year: budding, flowering,

fruiting, and leaf-shedding are always going on in one aspect or another.

The colon is here a sign that what is about to follow will help to amplify or illustrate what has just been said. The reader's way is thus prepared in advance, as it were, so that the meaning of the whole sentence can be quickly understood.

On the other hand, punctuation is not intended to cure the ambiguity of such sentences as these:

1. Tom had tea on the train after he had caught it at three o'clock.
2. Mr James was no less anxious to capture the burglar than his son.
3. A woman was observed loitering about the place where the child was seen carrying a child.

The construction of these sentences is radically unsound: they need to be either rearranged or entirely rewritten.

All the above remarks refer to the grammatical work of stops. But stops do another kind of work of some importance—that of intensifying the effect by adding emphasis or suggesting feeling. Take this sentence, for example:

He gave the boy who found the purse a shilling.

Here we have a plain statement of fact. We cannot tell from the sentence as it stands whether the writer thinks that the reward is adequate or not; whether, indeed, he has any opinion at all about the matter. But suppose a comma is inserted after **purse:**

He gave the boy who found the purse, a shilling.

Here we are aware of a difference. The writer is now

aiming at a certain effect; he desires to point out and to emphasise the meanness of the person who gave such a small reward. In other words, the comma introduces the element of feeling. This rhetorical or emotional work of stops, as it is called, should be carefully noted, as it is clearly opposed to the normal practice, and thus tends to make the strict application of hard and fast rules impracticable.

Summary of the Main Rules of Punctuation

We shall discuss, in a moment, some of the common errors made in the use of stops. But before we do that, you may like to have a brief reminder of the kind of work that each stop does. Here it is:

The Full Stop (.) is used at the end of a sentence, and after abbreviations.

The Comma (,) marks off words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence, such as the items in a list, adverb clauses, interpolations, etc.

The Semicolon (;) separates two co-ordinate clauses not joined by a conjunction, especially when these clauses contain parts of their own subdivided by commas.

The Colon (   ) is mainly used to introduce a direct statement or a direct question, and lists or enumerations of things.

The Question Mark (?) is used after a direct question.

The Exclamation Mark (!) is used after an interjection, or at the end of phrases or complete sentences that form an exclamation.

Quotation Marks (" ") or (' ') indicate that the actual words of a speaker or writer are being given.

The Dash (—) is used to denote an abrupt turn or sudden break in a sentence.

The Hyphen ( ) is used to form compounds and to divide words into syllables.

The Apostrophe (') is used to denote the omission of some letter or letters from a word, or to indicate the genitive (possessive) case.

Brackets ( ) enclose a parenthesis; that is, words inserted into a passage to which they are not grammatically essential.

It should here be said that the full stop represents the longest time pause, and the comma the shortest, the relative values of the four main stops being: full stop, 4; colon, 3; semicolon, 2; comma, 1.

We shall now consider in detail some of the errors in punctuation that are most frequently made.

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE FULL STOP

Too Many Full Stops

The war was over. The troops had been disbanded. There was immense relief. For seven weary years the struggle had continued. Now there was suddenly peace. But it was an uneasy peace. Everyone waited. The war was expected to break out again at any moment.

(This tendency to overwork the full stop at the expense of other stops has been called 'the spot-plague'. It is the usual accompaniment of a flight of excessively short sentences. The passage, after a few slight adjustments, could be punctuated as follows: 'The war was over. The troops had been disbanded, and there was immense relief. For seven

weary years the struggle had continued, and now there was suddenly peace. But it was an uneasy peace. Everyone waited; for the war was expected to break out again at any moment'.)

Full Stop after Incomplete Sentences

Midnight. Not a soul in sight. Crime afoot. Dark, sinister crime. Unknown to the police. Unknown to any one. The criminals excepted.

(The full stop is sometimes used to mark the close of a sentence that is not grammatically complete. But there are limits to this usage, and the example given —which does not contain a single grammatically complete sentence—is a case in point.)

Redundant Full Stop

1. The basket was crammed with apples, oranges, pears, plums, etc..

(When a contraction occurs at the end of a sentence, only one full stop is needed; in other words, the full stop indicating the contraction is omitted.)

2. He added a short P.S. to the letter.

(The full stop after the 'P' is not required. Write, 'He added a short PS. to the letter'.)

Omission of Full Stop after a Contraction

1. One member of the committee was the Hon Geo E Brown.

(Write, 'One member of the committee was the Hon. Geo. E. Brown'.)

2. Mr. Fellows took up his new post with Messrs. A. Walters at once.

(When a contraction ends with the same letter as the complete word, the full stop is optional. We recommend you to omit it. Write, 'Mr Fellows took up his new post with Messrs A. Walters at once'.)

3. It was now the 3rd. March, and the ship should have arrived on the 20th. February.

(1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. are not regarded as contractions, and no full stop is needed. Write, 'It was now the 3rd March, and the ship should have arrived on the 20th February'.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE COMMA

Too Many Commas

It would, perhaps, be better, if I may say so, without undue interference, that you should, for your own sake, as well as that of others, leave this matter, from now on, entirely alone.

(This passage is grossly overstopped. Write, 'It would perhaps be better, if I may say so without undue interference, that you should, for your own sake as well as that of others, leave this matter from now on entirely alone'.)

Omission of Necessary Comma

They bought cake, scones, buns, bread and butter.

(The comma is used to mark off a series of words, including the last but one, even though this word may be followed by **and.** Write, 'They bought cake, scones, buns, bread, and butter'—unless of course you mean **bread-and-butter.**)

Omission of One of a Pair of Commas

1. By the way Henry, I want to speak to you about your work.

(**Henry** is a Nominative of Address, and should be marked off by commas. The first of these commas has here been omitted. Write, 'By the way, Henry, I want to speak to you about your work'.)

2. Many, if not all of these people have treated him abominably.

(**If not all** is a parenthesis, and should be placed between commas. Write, 'Many, if not all, of these people have treated him abominably'.)

Misplacement of a Comma

All I have to say is, that if he does come, I shall not see him.

(**That** here belongs to the noun clause—**that I shall not see him**—not to the adverb clause. The comma should be placed accordingly. Write, 'All I have to say is that, if he does come, I shall not see him'.)

Separation of Verb from its Subject

That he will agree to the proposal, seems extremely unlikely.

(Write, 'That he will agree to the proposal seems extremely unlikely'.)

Separation of Verb from its Object

He then said, that he had changed his mind about going to France that year.

(Write, 'He then said that he had changed his mind about going to France that year'.)

Separation of Verb from its Complement

What we now want is, better pay all round.

(Write, 'What we now want is better pay all round'.)

Separation of Verb from Subject and Complement

What we now want, is, better pay all round.

(Write, 'What we now want is better pay all round'.)

Separation of Noun and Participle in the Absolute Construction

The reader, having finished the book he had borrowed, the librarian exchanged it for another.

(Here, 'The reader having finished the book he had borrowed', is the absolute construction, and the noun **reader** is wrongly separated from its participle **having finished.** Write, 'The reader having finished the book he had borrowed, the librarian exchanged it for another'.)

Separation of Defining Relative from its Antecedent

The man, who is always criticising his friends, will soon have no friends left to criticise.

(Write, 'The man who is always criticising his friends will soon have no friends left to criticise'.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE SEMICOLON

Comma instead of Semicolon

1. She was dreadfully stern and strict, she made the little girls curtsey whenever they spoke to her.

(Two co-ordinate clauses, especially when a conjunction is not used, should be separated by a semicolon. Write, 'She was dreadfully stern and strict; she made the little girls curtsey whenever they spoke to her'.)

2. (a) A decision was forced upon me, consequently I acted as I did.

(b) I shall come if the weather is good, otherwise don't expect me.

(c) They all said he could not do it, yet in the end he succeeded.

(Two clauses joined by conjunctions such as **consequently, therefore, otherwise, yet,** which express opposition or contrast, or which introduce an inference, should be separated by a semicolon. Write, 'A decision was forced upon me; consequently I acted as I did', etc.)

Confusion of the Main and Subordinate Divisions of a Sentence

When he comes this afternoon, ask him what has happened, and if he doesn't know, get it from Arthur himself.

(The semicolon is used to separate two long co-ordinate clauses, when these clauses contain parts of their

own subdivided by commas. Write, 'When he comes this afternoon, ask him what has happened; and if he doesn't know, get it from Arthur himself'.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE QUESTION MARK

Full Stop instead of Question Mark after Direct Question

Why do you come here creating a disturbance.

(Write, 'Why do you come here creating a disturbance?')

Question Mark Wrongly Used after an Indirect Question

Ask him why he didn't keep his appointment?

(Write, 'Ask him why he didn't keep his appointment'.)

Too Few Question Marks

What is his name, who are his parents, where does he live?

(A question mark should be placed after each separate question in a series of questions, if each requires a separate answer. Write, 'What is his name? Who are his parents? Where does he live?')

Too Many Question Marks

What is likely to be the total cost of keeping the terms? attending the lectures? and living in London during term time?

(If a series of questions requires only one answer, only one question mark is used, and that is placed at the end of the sentence. Write, 'What is likely to be the total cost of keeping the terms, attending the lectures, and living in London during term time?')

Question Mark used Ironically

This humorous (?) comment was not appreciated.

(The ironical use of the question mark is the sign of an inferior writer and should be avoided.)

Full Stop instead of Question Mark after a Sentence Declaratory in Form but Interrogative in Meaning

'You didn't really mean to harm him'. 'No, it was a pure accident'.

(Write, 'You didn't really mean to harm him?' 'No, it was a pure accident'.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE EXCLAMATION MARK

Full Stop instead of Exclamation Mark after an Exclamation

How he ran.

What an extraordinary thing.

(Write, 'How he ran!' and 'What an extraordinary thing!')

Wrong Position of Exclamation Mark

Oh! that woman.

(The exclamation mark should be placed at the end of an exclamatory phrase, not directly after the exclamation. Write, 'Oh, that woman!')

Too Few Exclamation Marks

But, soft, behold, lo, where it comes again!

(The exclamation mark should be placed after each exclamatory word, phrase, or sentence, in a series of words, phrases, or sentences. Write, 'But, soft! behold! lo! where it comes again'.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF QUOTATION MARKS

Omission of One of a Pair of Quotation Marks

After a pause he remarked, 'Where did you obtain this information?

(Careless writers often forget to insert the final

quotation mark. It should here be placed after the question mark.)

Quotation Marks Wrongly Omitted from a Word or Phrase Used in a Special Sense

She complained that she was thoroughly fed up, and was going to resign.

(Write, 'She complained that she was thoroughly "fed up", and was going to resign'.)

Quotation Marks Wrongly Used to Denote Indirect Speech

Watson said 'that he would do what you wanted—unconditionally'

(Write, 'Watson said that he would do what you wanted—unconditionally'. If it is important that the exact words of the speaker should be quoted, they should be given in direct speech: **Watson said, 'I will do what you want—unconditionally'.**)

Right Order as between Quotation Marks and the Question Mark and the Exclamation Mark

1. When they had rested for about an hour he said, 'Shall we now go on'?

(The question mark here belongs to the direct question, 'Shall we now go on?', and should therefore be placed **before** the second quotation mark. Write, **When they had rested for about an hour he said, 'Shall we now go on?'**)

2. Why did he say, 'This decision is one you will regret?'

The question mark here belongs to the containing sentence, and should therefore be placed **after** the second quotation mark. Write, **Why did he say, 'This decision is one you will regret'?**)

3. Why did he say, 'What is the use of doing anything now?'?

(When a sentence in the form of a direct question ends

with a quotation which itself is in that form, only one question mark is used, and that is placed outside the final quotation mark. Write, **Why did he say, 'What is the use of doing anything now'?**)

The right order as between Quotation Marks and the Exclamation Mark is determined in exactly the same way.

Right Order as between Quotation Marks and True Stops

(a) He then said, 'I shall expect them here to-morrow evening.'

(b) He then said, 'I shall expect them here to-morrow evening'.

(It is the custom of nearly all printers, for appearance' sake, to place a true stop—full stop, comma, semi-colon, or colon—**before** the second quotation mark. This is, strictly speaking, incorrect, as we can see from the first example just given; for there the full stop, which closes the sentence, cuts off the second inverted comma, and leaves it helplessly marooned. It has therefore been suggested that the stop should be placed **outside** the second inverted comma. This suggestion, however, has not been at all widely accepted, and you must decide for yourself which alternative you wish to adopt. You will probably find it simpler, for the time being, to follow the usual practice.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE DASH

Omission of the Dash at the End of a Parenthesis

The fine—and it was no small one, did little to stop his activities.

(Write, 'The fine—and it was no small one—did little to stop his activities'.)

Dashes in Addition to Brackets

He now bought the car for £500—(I had previously agreed to this)—and he paid £200 down.

(Write, 'He now bought the car for £500—I had previously agreed to this—and he paid £200 down' Or, alternatively, use brackets only.)

Dash Wrongly Used as a Substitute for other Stops

Lovely place—having a wonderful time—weather superb—no rain for a week—bathing every day—will write again soon.

(This sort of thing is all very well on a picture post-card, but the dash is, apparently, the only mark of punctuation known to a good many people. Use it with discretion.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE HYPHEN

Wrong Omission of the Hyphen

1. Her fiancé was a soft roe merchant.

(Write, 'Her fiancé was a soft-roe merchant'.)

2. They tried to reenter the building.

(Write, 'They tried to re-enter the building'.)

3. It was a never to be forgotten experience.

(Write, 'It was a never-to-be-forgotten experience' But—'It was an experience never to be forgotten'.)

4. His most treasured possession was a new diving suit.

(Here **diving** is a participle, and **diving suit** means 'a suit that dives', which is nonsense. Write, 'His most treasured possession was a new diving-suit', where **diving** is a gerund used as an adjective, and **diving-suit** means 'a suit for diving'.)

Wrong Insertion of the Hyphen

None-the-less, it was a very good beginning.

(Write, 'None the less, it was a very good beginning'.)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF THE APOSTROPHE

Its and It's

(a) I don't think its at all unusual.

(b) The jug has lost it's handle.

(In the first sentence, **its** means **it is,** and should be written **it's.** In the second sentence, **it's** is the possessive case of **it,** and should be written **its.**)

Your's and Their's

It seems to me that the fault was their's, not your's.

(There are no such words as **their's** and **your's.** The possessives **theirs** and **yours** are not written with an apostrophe.)

Omission of the Apostrophe

It is the boys turn next, and they should do well.

(**Boys** is in the possessive case and should be written **boys'.** There is a tendency nowadays, however, to omit the apostrophe, especially when the idea of possession is more or less negligible; e.g. **Girls School, Students Union, Dogs Home.**)

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF CAPITALS

1. They arrived in England last Autumn.

(The names of the days of the week, and the months of the year begin with capitals, but not the names of the seasons. Write, 'They arrived in England last autumn'.)

2. (a) The bunsen burner came into use during the latter part of the 19th century.

(b) In those days a Macadamised road was a startling innovation.

(A proper name used as an adjective begins

with a capital letter, but most derivatives from proper names do not. Write, 'The Bunsen burner came into use during the latter part of the 19th century'; and 'In those days a macadamised road was a startling innovation'.)

3. He had just finished reading that delightful and witty comedy, *The importance of being Earnest.*

(The chief words in a heading, or in the title of a book, play, etc., should each begin with a capital. Write, 'He had just finished reading that delightful and witty comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest*'.)

4. Villon asks, 'where are the snows of yester year?' and so far no one has vouchsafed an answer.

(A passage that is in direct speech, or that is a direct quotation, should begin with a capital. Write, 'Villon asks, "Where are the snows of yester year?" and so far no one has vouchsafed an answer'.)

5. With leaden foot time creeps along.

(A noun that is personified should begin with a capital. Write, 'With leaden foot Time creeps along'.)

6. Alas! They had been friends in youth.

(No capital is required after an exclamation that consists of a single word or phrase. Write, 'Alas! they had been friends in youth'.)

The following are some additional examples of the various ways in which capitals are used: the Reformation, the Lord Chief Justice, the Government, the House of Commons, the Grand Old Man, MSS., N.E., the War Department, the Bible, Lady Day.

But note: brussels sprouts, french chalk, morocco leather.

EXERCISES ON PUNCTUATION

I

Punctuate the following passages, and supply all the necessary capitals:

1. if he wished to pursue a bold policy it was indispensable that he should conclude an alliance with france and the tone of the french ministers had not of late been such as to reassure him. *Paul Friedmann*

2. all the sounds that nature utters are delightful at least in this country i should not perhaps find the roaring of lions in africa or of bears in russia very pleasing but i know no beast in england whose voice i do not account musical. *William Cowper*

3. certainly returned mrs john dashwood but however one thing must be considered when your father and mother moved to norland though the furniture of stanhill was sold all the china plate and linen was saved and is now left to your mother her house will therefore be almost immediately fitted up as soon as she takes it. *Jane Austen*

4. mr burchell who was one of the party was always fond of seeing some innocent amusement going forward and set the boys and girls to blindmans buff my wife too was persuaded to join in the diversion and it gave me pleasure to think that she was not yet too old. *Oliver Goldsmith*

5. the whole course of bacons behaviour from the first rumour to the final sentence convinces me that not the discovery of the thing only but the thing itself came upon him as a surprise and that if anybody had told him the day before that he stood in danger of a charge

of taking bribes he would have received the suggestion with unaffected incredulity.

James Spedding

6. the great silent ship with her population of blue-jackets marines officers captain and the admiral who was not to return alive passed like a phantom the meridian of the bill sometimes her aspect was that of a large white bat sometimes that of a grey one in the course of time the watching girl saw that the ship had passed her nearest point the breadth of her sails diminished by foreshortening till she assumed the form of an egg on end. *Thomas Hardy*

7. deep hearted majestic terrible as the sea the men of venice moved in sway of power and war pure as her pillars of alabaster stood her mothers and maidens from foot to brow all noble walked her knights the low bronzed gleaming of sea rusted armour shot angrily under their blood red mantle folds. *John Ruskin*

8. and for omar the persian there were many gratifications and among those that thrill and rightly the bodily senses he was no despiser of the common joys of mankind he acknowledged their blessedness for him as for blake earth was a beautiful place like brother martin he loved wine and song. *Frederick York Powell*

II

Supply the necessary stops and capitals in the following passages:

1. and which of all them smoking monsters is the ankworks boat i wonder goodness me cried mrs gamp
what boat did you want asked ruth

the ankworks package mrs gamp replied i will not deceive you my sweet child why should i

that is the antwerp packet in the middle said ruth

and i wish it was in jonadges belly i do cried mrs gamp appearing to confound the prophet with the whale in this miraculous aspiration. *Charles Dickens*

2. the two crowds are mingled now and no mistake and the shouts come all in a heap over the water now st ambrose six strokes more now exeter youre gaining pick her up mind the gut exeter brave st ambrose the water rushes by still eddying from the strokes of the boat ahead tom fancies now he can hear their oars and the working of their rudder and the voice of their coxswain. *Thomas Hughes*

3. my young master in london is dead said obadiah a green satin night gown of my mothers which had been twice scoured was the first idea which obadiahs exclamation brought into susannahs head well might locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words then quoth susannah we must all go into mourning but note a second time the word mourning notwithstanding susannah made use of it herself failed also of doing its office it excited not one single idea tinged either with grey or black all was green. *Laurence Sterne*

4. i was highly pleased with the extraordinary vigour of his conversation and regretted that i was drawn away from it by an engagement at another place i had for a part of the evening been left alone with him and had ventured to make an observation now and then which he received very civilly so that i was satisfied that though there was a roughness in his manner there was no ill nature in his disposition davies followed me to the door and when i complained to him a little of the hard blows which the great man had given me he kindly took upon

him to console me by saying dont be uneasy i can see he likes you very well. *James Boswell*

5. if mr knightley did not begin seriously he was obliged to proceed so for his proposal was caught at with delight and the oh i should like it of all things was not plainer in words than manner donwell was famous for its strawberry beds which seemed a plea for the invitation but no plea was necessary cabbage beds would have been enough to tempt the lady who only wanted to be going somewhere she promised him again and again to come much oftener than he doubted and was extremely gratified by such a proof of intimacy such a distinguishing compliment as she chose to consider it.

Jane Austen

6. it would be an omission trifling indeed but unpardonable were we to forget the green moss that had long since gathered over the projections of the windows and on the slopes of the roof nor must we fail to direct the readers eye to a crop not of weeds but flower shrubs which were growing aloft in the air not a great way from the chimney in the nook between two of the gables.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

7. neither have i any interest in the higher branches of commerce such as traffic with spice islands and porterage of painted tea chests or carved ivory for all this seems to me to fall under the head of commerce of the drawing room costly but not venerable i respect in the merchant service only those ships that carry coals herrings salt timber iron and such commodities and that have disagreeable odour and unwashed decks but there are few things more impressive to me than one of these ships lying up against some lonely quay in a black sea fog with the furrow traced under its tawny keel far in the harbour slime. *John Ruskin*

8. it was grey harsh easterly weather the swell ran pretty high and out in the open there were skippers daughters when i found myself at last on the divers platform twenty pounds of lead upon each foot and my whole person swollen with ply and ply of woollen underclothing one moment the salt wind was whistling round my night capped head the next i was crushed almost double under the weight of the helmet as that intolerable burden was laid upon me i could have found it in my heart only for shames sake to cry off from the whole enterprise but it was too late.

Robert Louis Stevenson

9. as florian walked one hot afternoon he overtook by the wayside a poor aged man and as he seemed weary with the road helped him on with the burden which he carried a certain distance and as the man told his story it chanced that he named the place a little place in the neighbourhood of a great city where florian had passed his earliest years but which he had never since seen and the story told went forward on his journey comforted and that night like a reward for his pity a dream of that place came to florian a dream which did for him the office of the finer sort of memory bringing its object to mind with a great clearness yet as sometimes happens in dreams raised a little above itself and above ordinary retrospect.

Walter Pater

10. this is the history of silas marner until the fifteenth year after he came to raveloe the livelong day he sat in his loom his ear filled with its monotony his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in the brownish web his muscles moving with such even repetition that their pause seemed almost as much a constraint as the holding of his breath but at night came his revelry at night he closed his shutters and made fast his doors and drew forth his gold long ago the heap of coins had become too large for the iron pot to hold

them and he had made for them two thick leather bags which wasted no room in their resting place but lent themselves flexibly to every corner how the guineas shone as they came pouring out of the dark leather mouths.

George Eliot

11. give your evidence the king repeated angrily or ill have you executed whether youre nervous or not.

im a poor man your majesty the hatter began in a trembling voice and i had not begun my tea not above a week or so and what with the bread and butter getting so thin and the twinkling of the tea

the twinkling of the what said the king

it began with tea the hatter replied

of course twinkling begins with a t said the king sharply do you take me for a dunce go on. *Lewis Carroll*

VI

COMMON ERRORS IN THE WRITING OF A COMPLETE COMPOSITION

We now come to the last and most important subject of all—that relating to some of the common errors usually made by students in the writing of a complete composition; for a careful study of those errors will often show you just where *you* are likely to go wrong, and thus help you very appreciably to improve your work.

Now a complete composition may take various forms: Essay, Letter, Report, Short Article, and so forth; but the only one of these that we shall select for purposes of discussion is the Essay. It is true, of course, that the Essay, as an exercise in English, has of recent years fallen into some disfavour, on the ground that, whatever else it may be that a pupil writes, it is certainly not an 'essay'; and that we can readily admit. But all that is here meant by the term is the school essay—a fairly short piece of prose composition on a set subject, generally narrative, descriptive, or argumentative in kind, and having a beginning, a middle, and an end. It must be confessed, however, that even on this level the results are far from satisfactory. It is not so much that the work is incurably bad as that it lacks care and thought, and with a little extra effort could be so much better than it is.

Perhaps we can best illustrate the different kinds of faults commonly found in a school essay—which in this respect must be regarded as representative of the other species of prose composition—by taking an actual example and examining it in some detail. Here, then, is a school essay, reproduced exactly as it was written:

The Importance of England's Insular Position

The position of England has been of great importance for many hundred years. England is situated between the Atlantic and the North Sea, it is to the North of France and Holland and is in Europe. During the Early Years of the Medievil Ages, England was of little importance. She traded with France and the countries near her, she is hemmed in on all sides by the sea and it was then difficult for invading forces to obtain a hold over her with their primitive boats, firearms, and weapons. The East itself had very little to do with her, as most of their trading was done with Palestine and the countries on the Mediterannean Shores.

Then came the discoveries in the West, and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the importance of England's position became realised. She became an important port-of-call, for ships passing from America to the East, being nearly midway between the two lands. After the turks had captured Constantinople, the traders in the east found that they must think out a new trade route. This lead them to England where they found a ready market for their wares.

The time in which her position stood her in most stead in those times was during war. England was fortunate in only having to watch one section at a time, for unless the enemy was able to land, little damage could be done. Where-as other countries had to protect themselves against enemies from land and sea. This safeguarding of England was made much easier by England becoming Mistress of the seas. By this fact and her military prowess, England gained for herself, the lands which now form the British Empire, together with some more lands which have since been lost.

Another important fact relating to England's insular position is climate. The sea tempers the climate and that is why we rarely have any great extremities of temperature.

To-day, however, England's position is not so safe as

it was before. The new invention of aircraft, and the powerful arms carried by ships give us a feeling of less security.

There are some disadvantages in being surrounded by sea, for in many cases, angry seas have undermined the cliffs and in places is gradually eating into the land; This makes the cliffs unsafe for habitation and somebody is loosing a portion of their land.

By having so many sea-side towns, it prevents one town becoming overcrowd and their is hardly any place more than fifty miles from the sea, so the rail or road fare is not very expensive although there are unfortunately many who cannot afford that short train journey.

What are we to say about this?

Well, in the first place, if a school essay is to have any value at all it must show at least three things: (1) that the writer has some knowledge of the subject; (2) that he knows how to arrange his ideas in good order; (3) that he is able to keep to the point.

Now it cannot be said that the writer of this essay knows nothing about the subject. On the contrary, it is obvious that he has a fair amount of material at his disposal, and several of the ideas he introduces are good. The trouble is that he does not know how to make the most of the knowledge he possesses. The essay is not well arranged, the work is often carelessly done, and sometimes he does not write upon the subject set.

Let us take the last point first. The subject set is 'The Importance of England's Insular Position'. It is quite clear, however, that the writer sometimes discusses, not the importance of England's *insular* position, but simply the importance of England's geographical position, a totally different thing. He does so, for instance, at the beginning of the first paragraph, and throughout nearly the whole of the second paragraph of the essay.

Again, in the interest of clearness, an essay should be

divided into definite sections or paragraphs, each of these paragraphs dealing with only one main topic. This requirement the writer has not always observed. For example, the first paragraph of the essay deals with at least two topics, the second of which begins at the words, 'During the early years . . .' Hence this section should form a separate paragraph. But even if it did so the new paragraph itself would be faulty, for two of the first three sentences deal with different subjects. Further, although a paragraph devoted to another topic separates the two paragraphs beginning, 'The time in which . . .' and 'To-day, however, . . .', these two paragraphs really deal with the same topic, and should therefore form one. All this is a sign of bad planning and faulty arrangement.

Other notable faults are:

Weak Sentence Construction

Most of the sentences are loose and rambling, and fail to hold the attention. Take this, for example: 'By having so many sea-side towns, it prevents one town becoming overcrowd and their is hardly any place more than fifty miles from the sea, so the rail or road fare is not very expensive although there are unfortunately many who cannot afford that short train journey' This is a very feeble concluding sentence.

Incorrect Spelling

Mediterannean for *Mediterranean, loosing* for *losing, lead* for *led, where-as* for *whereas, overcrowd* for *overcrowded,* (a very common type of careless error), *Medievil* for *Medieval, their* for *there.*

Faulty Grammar and Idiom

1. '*Only having* to watch one section', for 'Having to watch *only one* section'.
2. 'The East *itself* had very little to do with her and most of *their* trade was done with Palestine'.

3. 'The position *became realised'*, for 'The position *was realised'*.
4. 'Angry seas *have* undermined the cliffs and *is* gradually eating into the land'.
5. 'This makes the cliffs unsafe for *habitation'*.

Wrong Punctuation and Capitals

1. Comma instead of semicolon or full stop after 'North Sea', line 3.
2. Comma instead of full stop after 'her', line 7.
3. Full stop instead of comma or semicolon after 'done', line 25.
4. 'Early Years' for 'early years', 'Shores' for 'shores', 'east' for 'East' (line 18), 'sea-side' for 'seaside', 'turks' for 'Turks'.

Well, there it is, and deplorable enough you will agree; but not a whit worse than the work of a good many other pupils. And that is a disturbing feature.

What, then, is to be done about it? The first thing you must realise is that essay-writing, or free composition of any kind for that matter, is not a thing that can be rushed. If you have been consistently doing careless and indifferent work for years, it is not at all likely that you will be miraculously cured in a week. None the less, *something* we think can be done, and done almost at once, to effect an improvement; so here are a few observations which it is hoped may be found of some practical help.

Some Practical Advice

The two main requirements in free composition are (a) to have something to say, and (b) to know how to say it.

In order to have something to say you must possess a good stock of general knowledge. The best way to acquire this knowledge is by a close observation and careful reading. Therefore keep your eyes open where-

ever you happen to be, and try to collect at first hand as much useful information as you can.

As regards reading, it is desirable that you should know something about the leading facts of History, Geography, Literature, and topics of general interest; not a detailed knowledge, of course, but enough to enable you to write intelligently upon the more general aspects of the subject. It is true that you are not required at any one time to write upon *all* the subjects set, but if your knowledge is unduly restricted, you may find that you cannot write upon *any* of them.

The next best thing to having the knowledge in your head is to know where to look for it. Access to some good reference books, such as *Whitaker's Almanac*, Brewer's *Reader's Handbook* and his *Phrase and Fable, Who's Who,* Sidney Lee's abridged *Dictionary of National Biography,* and *Chambers's Encyclopaedia,* is indispensable. Further, you will obtain a good deal of help from a study of one or two reputable newspapers, such as *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian,* and by listening to some of the popular lectures arranged from time to time by the B.B.C. To ensure a permanent record of your labours, keep a notebook and enter in note form a selection of the miscellaneous information you have been able to gather.

So much then for collecting information which will enable you to have something to say. Your chief difficulty, however, is likely to be that of knowing how to say it. Hence you will do well to consider the following points:

When you are about to write upon a subject, but before you put pen to paper, think very carefully over what you intend to say and then briefly note down your thoughts just as they arise.

The next thing is to put these thoughts into shape. A composition is an organic whole, and whatever else it lacks it must possess unity and coherence; that is to say, all the ideas introduced must relate to the subject

chosen, and all must be arranged in the right order.

The best plan therefore is to arrange your ideas in a series of outline paragraphs, gathering together the main ideas to form the topics or headings of the various paragraphs, and grouping under each of these headings the subordinate ideas which you intend to embody in the several sentences of the paragraph.

The two most important parts of a composition are the beginning and the end: the beginning because first impressions are important and it is difficult to recover from a bad start; and the end because, if the final impression you make is an unfavourable one, you will go far to destroy all the effects you have been carefully building up throughout the rest of the composition. Try therefore to gain and hold the reader's attention at the outset by every legitimate device in your power, and to leave him well satisfied when he has read your final words. The only way in which you can learn how to do this is for you to study models where it has been already sucessfully done; some of the essays, for example, of Hazlitt, Lamb, J. B. Priestley, Robert Lynd, E V Lucas, and Alice Meynell.

Your composition should be a carefully balanced whole; that is to say, each part should be treated at a length proportionate to its relative importance.

Again, keep to the point. If you fail to do this, you will be writing, for the time being, upon some other subject than the one with which you are supposed to be dealing.

Express your opinions modestly, but firmly and sincerely. At the same time, avoid an obtrusive use of the first person singular. In fact do not use the first person at all, unless the subject is obviously one that demands such treatment.

Remember that each paragraph must be devoted to a new aspect of the subject, and that everything in a paragraph must bear in some way upon the topic with which it deals. Hence, do not introduce two topics into

one paragraph, and do not devote two paragraphs to the exposition of what is but one main *theme.*

Aim at making your sentences clear, varied, and rhythmical. See, therefore, that each sentence contains only one main *fact,* that the parts of the sentence are arranged in their proper sequence, and that the emphasis is on the most important words. Long sentences should, generally speaking, be avoided.

Pay great attention to the use of words. Try to find the exact word to express your thought, and be satisfied with no other. Be on your guard against repetition and wordiness. Avoid new words (unless they are indispensable), and most foreign words, dialect words, technical terms, and slang. Never use a word of which you do not know the meaning.

Avoid hackneyed quotations, sarcasm, puns, unrestrained humour, and sentimentality. Humour is frequently a snare, particularly in examinations; for in the solemn atmosphere of the examination-room things are apt to seem funny which to the cold and dispassionate eye of the examiner seem merely silly.

Grammatical errors are likely to be very troublesome, but some of the most important have already been dealt with in Section IV.

Punctuation is another pitfall. The best general advice we can give is that you should punctuate lightly; and the best particular advice, that you should not use a comma if the meaning is equally clear without it. Further, take care not to put a stop between the subject and its verb, or between the verb and its object. Do not overwork the dash by trying to make it do duty for every other kind of stop; the dash has its own definite uses: keep to them.

Handwriting and spelling should also receive attention. Handwriting is intended to be read: it should therefore be legible; but very often it is not. The result is that little or no credit can be given for the work done.—Again, spelling is often a weak spot. Many spelling

mistakes are due to mere carelessness. Errors are made in words which the pupil knows perfectly well how to spell, and even in words which are on the examination-paper before him. For such negligence there is no excuse. But there are some whose spelling seems a natural defect, and they are prepared to accept the fact with resignation. This attitude, however, is not one to be encouraged, as the defect is usually traceable to nothing more natural than hasty and careless reading.

The question is often asked: 'What length should a school essay be?' Well, this will necessarily vary with different pupils, as some write with far greater fluency than others: but as some sort of rough guide it may be said that experience shows that a pupil of average ability can write between four and five hundred words in an hour.

Revise your work with the greatest possible care, trying to improve it in this final revision in every way you can. Much promising work is spoilt by failure to revise.

Lastly, if you wish to write good English you must read good English; that is, read it with care, diligence, and close attention.

EXERCISES ON COMPOSITION

1. Collect as much information as you can relating to the last fight of *The Revenge,* using any reference books which you may find it necessary to consult. Then tell the story in your own words, making it as vivid and stirring as you find possible.

2. Write down four or five examples of Great Events that have Sprung from Little Causes. Choose *one* of the events you mention, and deal with it in greater detail, with the object of showing the truth of the saying in that particular instance.

3. Describe the district where you would like to live

if you were able to choose, giving reasons for your choice.

4. Describe the window display of a bicycle shop, basing your description entirely upon personal observation.

5. Tell a story illustrating some act of foolish bravado.

6. Describe some of the most interesting things you have seen in an Old Curiosity Shop.

7. Invent some new adventure of Gulliver among the Lilliputians, and make it appear as probable as you can.

8. 'G.P.O. Detection Van Hunts for Mysterious Radio Station in Sussex'.

Taking this as your central theme, write a short story describing in detail the hunt that went on, and what the mysterious radio station finally proved to be.

9. Write a humorous sketch called *Our Home-made Wireless Set.*

10. 'The servant problem will eventually be solved by the "robot servant" The sooner we get mechanised servants the better it will be for everybody, for there is far too much discontent among maids and mistresses'.

Suppose that the 'robot servant' has arrived; give a sketch, preferably humorous, of domestic life in such strange and novel circumstances.

SUBJECTS FOR COMPOSITIONS

1. The spirit of adventure
2. Hand-made and machine-made articles
3. Spare hours
4. Day schools and boarding schools
5. Impressions after a visit to the Zoo
6. English trees
7. The purposes of a university
8. The influence of rivers on history
9. The sources of laughter
10. Beggars, professional and otherwise

11. Scientific research
12. Animals in literature
13. Vaudeville
14. 'Every one complains of his memory; none of his judgment'
15. Village life
16. The effects of broadcasting on a people's speech
17. A barber's shop
18. Canvassers
19. Fireworks
20. The poetry of Robert Burns
21. A review of any film or play you have seen
22. A railway accident
23. 'Came the dawn'
24. Christmas presents
25. 'Time's winged chariot'
26. Modern architecture
27. Bridges
28. Poster advertisements
29. Right and wrong spending
30. Books for reading on a railway journey
31. Describe in your own words some scene from recent history.
32. The housing problem to-day
33. The aftermath of the second Great War
34. Queer people you have known
35. Witches, ghosts, and fairies in literature
36. Conversation
37. A Parliamentary Election
38. The lessons of astronomy
39. Slavery
40. Sight-seeing
41. Dickens's London
42. Gilbert and Sullivan
43. The power of eloquence
44. The preservation of country dialects
45. The distribution of wealth
46. The disadvantages of civilisation

47. Mimicry
48. Earned and unearned incomes
49. Solitude
50. Lotteries
51. Can world peace be attained?
52. The adventures of a bicycle
53. A cathedral or old church
54. Historical novels
55. The value of knowing foreign languages
56. A concert you have recently attended
57. The future of mechanical transport
58. Is sport legitimate when directed against animal life?
59. A walking-tour in your own country
60. An English river
61. Reason and Instinct
62. Life in the tropics
63. The character in history that you most dislike
64. Your favourite occupation
65. Thoughts suggested by a rainy day
66. The relation of a liberal education to life
67. Do we gain or lose by doing things more quickly than our forefathers?
68. The scientific results of exploration
69. Museums and art galleries for instruction and pleasure
70. 'As We Were'
71. War poetry
72. An account of anything you have made
73. Chivalry in the Middle Ages
74. Printing and civilisation
75. Some great English humorists
76. How to plan and run a labour-saving house
77. Anaesthetics
78. The British Museum
79. The national characteristics of the people of the United States
80. 'The glory that was Greece'

81. Alexander the Great
82. Was the Norman Conquest a blessing to England?
83. The nationalisation of the coal mines
84. Are we becoming a lazy people?
85. Invention and imagination
86. The influence of newspapers on public opinion
87. The plays of J. B. Priestley
88. A character-sketch of someone well known to you
89. The adventures of an umbrella
90. A description of the district in which you live
91. The worst holiday you have ever spent
92. The confessions of a fountain-pen
93. The humour and pathos of Lamb's essays
94. The pleasures and pains of athletics
95. 'Where there is no vision the people perish'
96. A description of some famous siege
97. French national characteristics
98. Water as a motive power
99. The causes of the decline of great nations
100. England and the United States
101. Heroism in everyday life
102. The autobiography of a seaside donkey
103. The national characteristics of the Scots
104. A visit to a fortune-teller
105. A fairy story of your own invention
106. Great plagues and pestilences
107. Your next-door neighbours
108. The magazine in modern life
109. Great men: their characteristics and their uses
110. Examinations as a test of knowledge and capacity
111. 'We live in deeds, not years'.
112. Our food supply
113. Talent and genius
114. Private enterprise
115. Social service
116. Plastics
117. Ants
118. Victorianism

119. Precious metals
120. Elizabeth Bennet
121. Basic English
122. House-hunting
123. Snobs
124. Satellite towns
125. Prefabricated houses
126. A strange adventure
127. Popular songs
128. Utopias
129. Lost dogs
130. Indoor amusements
131. Wild animals in captivity
132. The ideal soldier
133. Prisoners of war
134. Churchyards
135. Eyes
136. Realism in fiction
137. Doctors in fiction
138. The five senses
139. Absence of mind
140. Royal pretenders
141. Cats
142. Rumour
143. The golden mean
144. Life insurance
145. Music
146. Russia to-day
147. Present-day fashions
148. Moral courage
149. 'This England'
150. The Nile

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